# Inês de Castro in Scenic and Performative Visions:

Studies on the Digital Collection of the Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança of Portugal *Michele Augusto* 

### Introduction

This work presents considerations about research into creative records in the Museu do Teatro e da Dança (MNTD) digital database. In this database, researchers of scene design use the archives of representations, through what Josete Feral (2015) calls "scenic and visual sketches," programs, photographs, scenic drawings, costumes, models, scene props, among other documents, in new projects. These documents can indicate the directions followed during the creative process and the result obtained so that researchers can develop their own corpus of inspiration.

This work is focused on creative practice as a means to develop new insights and understanding through deliberate inquiry. Recognition of the dynamic and reflexive nature of interactions and conceptual development provides the researchers and practitioners (Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes 2007) tools for investigation into the creative process as well as practice and research in the performing arts.

The method chosen was based on the analysis of the esthetic variations found in the digital collection, evaluating the possibilities of identifying symbols common to all productions, by the files available for digital consultation. However, the iconographic and symbolic data particular to each montage can transmit different impressions and generate ideas and formations of different patterns for new scenic or academic research, especially in the creative practice of research.

The multiple creative possibilities for analysis of the archive of collective memory allows us to perceive the development of the same theme, as well as significant variants and forms of visual representation and the signs used. Each team develops these connections according to the staging intentions and characteristics of the company and scene direction.

By analyzing the colors, fabrics, textures, and silhouettes in the designs, costumes, and stage photos, we can understand the symbolism and messages transmitted in each staged version. We can capture the difference between the structure of conceptual and image codes and their respective decoding, as Flusser (2017, 110) contextualized.

The Inês de Castro versions showcased at the MNTD indicate the development of a visual code that represents the collective imagination of a particular time and place. The data collected from this analysis are valuable for future research into the performing arts and their relationship with museum heritage archives. The scenic montages, by MatrizNet database, were chosen based on their ability to identify the character's visual and symbolic identity by the records of the costume-design drawings, with added value to those that incorporated their respective scene costumes with photographs of the shows on stage.

## The Collection of the Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança

MNTD is the archive of memories and history of the performing arts in Portugal. It was founded by Vítor Pavão dos Santos with the support of Amélia Rey Colaço in 1982, with the goal collecting, preserving, identifying, studying, and disseminating information related to the theater and other forms of spectacle, as described by José Alvarez (2005). Its collection, with about 260,000 pieces ("Assim Vê-Se Melhor: Um Olhar Sobre o Museu Nacional do Teatro Enquanto Sistema de Informação" 2014), has been constructed from works of performing arts, collective memory, and ephemera of various creative processes. The collection consists of pieces like stage costumes, photographs, illustrated postcards, models of set designs, drawings, portraits, caricatures, posters, programs, leaflets, and sheet music.

The space functions as a guardian of the memories of the performing arts, being the testimonial to national cultural values. It also engages an element of identity and collective memory that has a significance in the development of the local community.

The MNTD archives are available on two digital platforms, via the Web site www.matrizpix.dgpc.pt and via the MatrizNet platform database, which can be consulted in person at the specialized museum library. MatrizPIX consists of an information system designed for the inventory, management and online availability of the photographic archives of the Direção-Geral do Património Cultural (DGPC).

The Matiz platform is the database of the museum network linked to

the DGPC (http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt). Through the platform, we can consult all the material in the custody of the MNTD.

The collection includes poetic fragments and signs of performers' imaginations. The archives are a journey of meaning that, over time, has been guided by spectators' constructions as well as by the records of photographs and documents of the creators themselves.

The case of envisioning Inês de Castro is based on scenic and visual sketches (Feral 2015) of costume designs by various artists in productions by Portuguese theatrical and ballet companies from the 1940s to the 1970s. The stage photographs and the costumes form the research corpus of the creative process – the back-and-forth between the work in process and the finished show (Feral 2015) — and the changes that occurred during scenic interaction.

Through digital collections, we can observe the process of interaction of new costume productions as well as research through digital means the collections as a basic resource and a relevant tool for maintaining the collections' social activity through digital and social media, further allowing greater reach and dialogues with the scene design teams and researchers. By consulting files, textual descriptions, image details, photographic records, analysis of materials used, comparisons and ways of creating past productions, we seek to understand a given character through the different versions across space-time. Such references, often found in virtual databases, facilitate the composition of new productions and projects.

The original museum objects are in very delicate states of conservation and preservation. This fact makes consultation and display of them for long periods in the light of exhibition spaces impractical. Systematic digitization and online availability of collections are needed, with a configuration of qualitative image and textual data to allow better interactivity with the performing arts community.

A costume designer, for example, coordinates various data from museum collections and contemporary data from cultural references to form an inspirational *corpus*. Fashion plates, magazines, stage and historical costumes, photographs, illustrations, social media, films, advertising, and historical bibliographic collections available in museums and other archives are cultural reserves to be used as documentary resources. Such data are compiled into signs, visual signifiers, which are connected during the costume creative process.

By observing signs that persist in different productions involving the same character, we can identify elements of the character's identity,

mapping the popular imagination that has developed over time with regard to the historical character.

Two aspects of the distribution of qualitative information are relevant to the specialized audience in costume design. The first question refers to images with good-quality resources and details. The possibility of enlargements and views of details separately from the elements increases the ease of access for the specific audience of creators, as well as any notes on the dimensions of the figures, description of fabrics, fabric samples, swatches that show textures and details in designs, links between photographs, costume sketches with scenarios and notes, descriptions of iconography of the designs including elements of inspiration, details and shapes, and the message conveyed to the viewer, descriptions of relevant elements of the illustrations and costumes, summaries and critical analysis of the characters' actions and motivation, and specifications to increase understanding of the common signs of the character's identity and any variations developed in each production. In the example of Inês de Castro, it becomes possible to evoke her historical memory based on the temporality of the narrative and the interpretations and subjective perspectives of each production.

The aim is to improve the qualitative presentation of data from images and productions and make designs and creative research more tangible. To achieve this, we can use digital and manual creative experiments, where images or fragments of images are used as formative elements for new ideas through collages and photomontages. These ideas should draw on concepts and symbols in the written data provided by the collection. We also can use new technologies combined with creative development processes, including artificial intelligence tools, prompts, keywords, and descriptive fields of technical sheets to generate new ideas. The digital accessibility of good-quality images is a necessary condition to improve the creative process.

The description used for practical transformation goes beyond visual signs, fabrics, and scene information. The complete data provide greater possibilities for understanding and mapping the intercessions and particularities of the consulted versions of the same character, for example, contributing to the formation of conventional codes to the collective imagination of this figure. All the exemplified forms become a common denominator when they are transformed into realistic images and physical objects of scene design, enabling the use of AI tools and digital manipulations. This can create new ways of presenting the collection's pieces, using other possibilities to explore the historical documents of the performing arts and expanding the possibilities of transforming collections into resourc-

es for contemporary productions and the new imaginative paths. This method unveils costumes through virtual visual reproductions, enabling the creation of accurate reconstructions and opening up new possibilities across different branches of the performing arts.

It's important to highlight the relationship between the museum, digital media, and the qualified data publication, so as to develop new perspectives and interactions that take into account the evolution of sociocultural interactions, the dissemination of more concise textual and iconographic data, and contextualization of the characters according to the intention of the production or the work of the costume designer.

## A Concise Historical Context

This investigation focuses on the theater companies mapped in the museum's collection, a case study of medieval themes and, especially, versions of Inês de Castro. Among the companies, we highlight the productions of Companhia Rey Colaço Nobles Monteiro (C. Rey Colaço N. M.), Companhia de Bailados Portugueses Verde Gaio (C. B. P. Verde Gaio), Teatro do Povo, Teatro Nacional Popular, Grupo Gulbenkian de Bailados, among others.

The C. B. P. Verde Gaio, Teatro do Povo and Teatro Nacional Popular were companies created through the *Política do Espírito* developed during the Portuguese Estado Novo (from 1926 to 1974) to strengthen its ideological bases, develop cultural activities in which the Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional (SPN) and the Secretariado Nacional da Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo (SNI) agencies, led by António Ferro, intended to communicate their ideals through forms of expression. To do so, the agencies used organizations, sectors, and cultural activities (Paulo 1994). In particular, two efforts were involved: The first was cultural production "of" and "for" the "people" through activities "guiding Popular Culture" that reinforced the socio-educational purpose of theatre with the people (Barthez 2019). The second was an "intellectual" effort – participation of elite producers and consumers of "culture." The first effort was represented by the productions of Teatro do Povo and the Teatro Nacional Popular and activities at popular festivities, and the second by C. B. P. Verde Gaio and other performing-arts and cultural actions.

Productions and companies followed the conditions and rules for controlling thematic approval, which meant that they were to be "formatted" from a political, cultural, and sociological point of view, according to the regimented canon, and not from a merely aesthetic-recreational

perspective (Barthez 2019, 277). Therefore, companies took care in the composition and formation of national imagery and production based on the use of signs identifiable to the public and the use of avant-garde esthetic resources. Some of these shows were staged in places of Portuguese historical heritage. In 1941, *Castro* was mounted in the Monastery of Alcobaça, by Amélia Rey Colaço and Robles Monteiro, in which the tragic and serene depth of Castro, as João Vilaretti reported in *Panorama* Magazine (no. 4, September 1941, 33) shows care in the style of the representation, depicting perfect rhythm, understanding, and unity.

The artists were responsible that productions follow some trends of the avant-garde artistic movements, receiving influences from modernism, a style implemented as the basis of the *Política de Espírito*. The visual esthetics were based on the renewal of national foundations, creating an enchanting scenographic atmosphere to form idealized popular imagery. This cultural representation was stylized within the framework of modernist plastic forms

## The Character

Inês de Castro belonged to the Portuguese royal house in the medieval period (1340 -1355), being the second wife of King Pedro I. The romance of Pedro and Inês begins while she was still the lady-in-waiting of his first wife, Constância. They began a clandestine love affair, which would later trigger the tragic end of this romance. Inês de Castro died on January 7, 1355, beheaded, as befitted a person of her condition (Inês de Castro / Fundação Inês de Castro, n.d.).

The character is generally described as a beautiful Galician woman with golden hair and a "heron neck." In popular imagination, she is candid, weak, and in love with a prince who adores her and will avenge her ("Inês de Castro Foi Morta Por Altas Razões de Estado?" 1932) after her tragic death. A most noble lady, who shared the blood of the houses of greatest grandeur in Portugal (Figueiredo 1817, 224), endowed with rare beauty, and extreme grace. Esthetic imagery begins to be created from her tomb in Alcobaça, as well as from a hypothetical representation of her in the genealogy that Infante Fernando had commissioned, in 1530, from António de Holanda and Simão Bening (Bule 2019, 25), a costumed representation that would have been the first image of Inês de Castro after the funerary monuments of Alcobaça. Some versions of the character's image appear in different productions, such as the scenic version, written between 1553

and 1556 by António Ferreira, the first historical staging of the love affairs of Pedro and Inês.

At this moment, we intend to elucidate challenges of outlining the codes that form the character's identity through scenic-image construction throughout the temporal space documented by the museum. The digital records in the database relate data between the companies' productions and costume artists responsible for the visual formations of the same character. However, it is worth highlighting the challenges of crossing textual information between the stages of elaboration and presentation of the costume, or the drawing, the costume and the photographs of the scene, the formal and structural modifications undergone during the creative process, the qualitative documentation correlated among these three objects through the analysis of images and textual data from their respective files.

We were able to capture relevant data for correlating stages of the process of forming the imagery of a character by observing designs based on historical costumes and the creative possibilities offered by the artists in terms of form, style and influence. The iconographic data reveal the visual thinking of the creative processes of the shows to identify the visual elements, as well as signs and meanings applied to the messages (Barthes, 2009) of the costume designs and records of costumes on stage.

The collection of performing arts by MNTD incorporates various productions on the theme of Inês de Castro. These productions reflect a historicist tendency toward background literature and national forms of representation. Inês and Pedro are the representatives of the "Portuguese soul" (Bule 2019, 113) and are inserted as the main characters in the foundational myths of the culture.

In this sense, research into the collection's photographs encourages the visuality of the characters and their stories, transforming myths and elements of the popular imagination into something tangible and factual in the eyes of the spectator, in which non-fictional and fictional aspects are mixed in the messages transmitted on stage. For example, in the photographs, and the costume of Lisete Frias in *Inês de Castro* by Companhia Rafael de Oliveira (Figure 1, top left, MNT 82262) we see that the character has been transformed into a Renaissance lady, in which the costume, as the material real, layer of the character (Rosenfeld, in. Cândido 1992) transports Inês to the scenario idealized by the first chronicles, with the dramatic impact of the red color and silhouette. Because the associations imply cultural and psychological aspects of the characters and their costumes (Barthes 1990), we may notice that the choices of shapes and colors may have been adapted to the common performative imaginary of their period

and the time of the first texts, transporting and displacing the character from her historical time to her own scenic timeline, with the strength of regal personality transmitted by the composition of adornments and tones of the costume.



Figure 1. Photographic record of productions involving Inês de Castro

(Above line) Inventory: MNT 82262; MNT 260573; MNT 260574; MNT 33617; (below line) MNT 258529; MNT 78925; MNT 78786.

Source: MNTD collection, available at: <a href="http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt">http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt</a>.

In the 1935 presentation titled *Castro* by C. Rey Colaço R. M. (Figure 1, lower right, MNT 78925, MNT 78786), the character Inês is characterized as a medieval lady. Her costume highlights a fitted and elongated silhouette, with wide oversleeves that are typical of the medieval fashion. The strokes used in the costume design take us back to the beginning of the fourteenth century, and they are presented in softer tones. Although it is not possible to identify the color of the costume, we can appreciate the

softness of the costume in comparison to the other character in the scene. The texture and characterization of the costume also transport the actress to her contemporary time, the fashion of the 1930s, presented through the use of satin fabric, the actress's posture, and the wavy hair. The cultural aspects of the time in which the show was created remain visually associated with the original historical period of the character.

The ballet *Inês de Castro* from the theater C. B. Verde Gaio in 1940 (Figure 1, center top, MNT 260574, MNT 260573) presents the character in the elongated silhouette and soft adornments, with a wide train and light and soft sleeves, the pink color identified through two drawings created by José Barbosa (Figure 2, upper right, MNT 141566 and MNT 261169), the visual choices of softer textures and colors seem to highlight a psychological character of sweetness and fragility, transmitted through the timeline.

As in Artur Casais's costumes for the spectacle *O Trono* by the Grupo Gulbenkian de Bailados in 1973 (Figure 1, bottom left, MNT 258529) in which the formatting of the medieval silhouette is reduced to decorations and headpieces, in yellowish and golden colors (Figure 2, top at center, MNT 204603) reflect an ethereal atmosphere that fills the scenic space as the performer moves.

In *Dona Inês de Portugal*, 1957, by C. Rey Colaço R. M. (Figure 1, top right, MNT 33617 and MNT 131546) despite the light-toned costumes, the representation of Inês seems to convey an austerity through her shape, the mass of broad adornments, capes, and posture, among other elements.

The documentary photographs of the spectacles provide information on different aspects of the conceptual organization of the representations. We can understand the variations in meaning and realize that each montage is unique.

# Costume Designs: Collection Memories as Inspiration

To José Carlos Alvarez (2005, 24), costume designs, pieces of clothing, masks, makeup, and props are a set of visual elements of the scenic act (staging) that directly refer to the actor's body and are intended to dress the character the actor represents in each dramatic context. The costumes may or may not try to reproduce a theme, getting as close as possible to the historical truth, through the exact reproduction of the taste and habits of a given time and region. Costumes also may portray a more subjective and universal perspective, with its functions of protecting the body, of social hierarchy, or of seduction. Also to consider is the influence of esthetic currents of the creation process in which costume designers develop their

own repertoires of signs when confronted with the signs that are presented to them.

The analysis of the costume designers' processes involves identifying clues and fragments that are developed based on the director's intention, the audience's viewing experience, and the signs used. These signs can appear as visual signifiers whose meanings disappear in the context of the work of costume designers, whose work produces the act of opening multiple paths that the spectator's imagination can explore (Feral 2015, 196). See Figure 2.

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Figure 2. Costume designs for productions on the theme of Inês de Castro

(Above line) Inventory: 34201; MNT 34202; MNT 204603; 181541-A; MNT 141566; MNT 261169; (below line) MNT 67042; MNT 58636; MNT 86483; 86528.

Source: MNTD collection, available at: <a href="http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt">http://www.matriznet.dgpc.pt</a>.

In *Inês de Castro* by C. B. Verde Gaio, in 1940 and 1948, José Barbosa and Paulo Ferreira developed different aesthetics based on an idealized imagery using elements from medieval fashion of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as very tight tunics below the bust and larger-volume skirts (Köhler 2001) as well as outer bell-shaped sleeves overlapping an inner dress with tight sleeves and embroidered fabric (Figure 2, top right, MNT 141566 and MNT 261169), which was described by Oliveira Marques (1981, 50 - 62) as a costume common in the fourteenth century. Belts were positioned at the waist and decorations finished the borders and neckline, with wider configuration, creating a softer and more delicate look for the character, along with the scarves and braids, which as applied to the stage costume are replaced by a type of turban more often seen in representations of fifteenth-century fashion. Barbosa uses the soft colors of yellowish beige and pink, possibly to highlight a more romantic and fragile character.

Paulo Ferreira, in 1948, developed a series of sketches for Inês de Castro in more colorful and vibrant versions, with contrasting color combinations (Figure 2, lower right, 86528 and MNT 86483). They are versions of a more imposing Inês with rich adornments and a regal figure, with the use of overcoats and capes inspired by the roundel and sleeve plaits, brooches, belts, and sashes adorning headdresses and pertinent to historic fashion.

In A Castro, Teatro do Povo, 1952, José Barbosa used minimalist esthetics of costume designs, with a wasp-waisted figure. As in late fourteenth century and fifteenth century fashion, the costume is cut tightly in the area below the bust and expands toward the belly, with long trains, tight buttoned sleeves, adornments such as gorgets, barbets, and turbans on the head and neck and front buttoning, which is as Inês is represented in her tomb. The costumes, one in shades of gray and pink (Figure 2, lower left, MNT 67042) and shades of gold, gray, pink and purple (Figure 2, lower left, MNT 58636), were without adornments, other than belts and bags. The imposing figure of the sketch is due to the silhouette, fabrics, shape, color combination and expression .

In *Dona Inês de Portugal*, C. Rey Colaço R. M., 1957, Emílio Lino identified her as the fifteenth-century fashion ideal, wearing overcoats with fur collars, crespine, and braids. The costumes for the first and second acts were designed in cream and black colors, and the fabric sample contained in the sketch (Figure 2, upper left, MNT34202) hints at the original color of the stage costume, confirmed by photographic references found in the museum's collection. The black costume evokes the fifteenth century with a robe tied by a belt below the waist with a V-shaped neckline. Changes

in format and colors between acts may reflect changes in the character's narrative.

In O Trono, Grupo Gulbenkian de Bailados, 1970, Artur Casais simplifies the elements of the fourteenth century to serve the needs of ballets, with cutouts and adornments outlining the neckline and center of the dress (Figure 2, upper center), with the offset waist and adornments, in lighter yellow, golden, and pink tones, according to the sketch, fabric samples, and description , which indicates that the costume will be made in wool crepe with gold. A diadem of beige silk cord, a crochet net, pearls, and a veil adorn the ballerina's head according to descriptions by Casais.

In *Inêz* ballet, an unidentified spectacle, 1969, Abílio de Mattos e Silva relied on popular medieval imagery to shape the costume, using more artistic constructions and historical references. Adornments and hair, such as combed braids, crowns, and a wide neckline, produce the message of the representation rather than a complete formal construction. The use of light pink in the character composition emphasizes the structural form and function of the ballet.

Costume designs are instruments for transmitting previously prepared messages that are part of the process of elaboration of the narrative. During the moment of imagination and creation of images, the references used, especially given the moment that the artists in this section developed their costumes, should be designed to become accessible to others (Flusser 2017, 162). The coding should feed the collective memory of the public through symbols recognizable by them. Therefore, fidelity to historical signs was not required for creative foundation.

#### Conclusion

The investigation intended to disseminate cultural heritage of the MNTD collection, highlighting the importance of the museum's relationship with new research possibilities, demonstrate how digital media assist both in the work of scene professionals and of researchers in the expansion of qualified data for the new perspective's constructions and interactions between teams. With the expansion of digital collections as tools beyond the physical borders of the museum, the qualitative database allows performance teams to build their creative repertoire collaboratively and interactively.

When analyzing past dramatic representations and literary narratives, we aim to find connections to the emotions and sensory experiences that are embedded in memories. Costume design is an example of this. Costume design goes beyond realism and incorporates symbols, images,

actions, words, and meanings to generate connections and messages with the public. This develops unique universes and atmospheres by using these creative fragments.

Each scenic setting, or versions of the same character as in the case of Inês de Castro, has an emotional charge, which the scene designer by doing research in variations can combine in the new creation proposal, using memory of other creations as an instrument of the imagery and collaborative signs of the new meanings developed.

The text discusses the political relationships and the mythical process of characters. It explores the many creative variations of the previous costume designers and their unique ways of visualizing the dramatis personae, stage recordings, and clothing references. These varied signs allow the public to build their imaginative perception and result in new research on the MNTD collection.

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