

A kind of street art - Lady of Health, Subidouro, Maia, Portugal

Artistic and religious expressions in the preservation of the local cultural heritage *



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* This e-exhibition is a revised version of a work published with the same title in the journal *Diálogos com a Arte – revista de arte, cultura e educação*, nº 6, 2016, pp. 221-230.

Silence.

The street lies naked and desert, but it will not take long for this street to become crowded and bloom.

The Marian devotion is undeniably an indelible mark of the Portuguese cultural heritage, evident in almost a thousand invocations of the Virgin, translated in its architectural expression in thousands of places of worship, attracting millions of believers and tourists (Aguiã, 1996; Almeida, 1979; Azevedo, 2001; Dias, 1987; Lima, 1997; Pereira, 2003; Pimentel, 1899; Reis 1967; Sanchis, 1977, 1992; Santa Maria, 1716; Santo, 1990). Subidouro (Maia) is one of more than three hundred places where every year there is a festive ritual dedicated to the Lady of Health.

Anchored in the anthropological work developed in places of worship of the Lady of Health in Portugal (Pereira, 2014-a, 2014-b, 2014-c, 2016), particularly in Subidouro, this paper draws on *ethnographic photography* to portray the artistic device on which natives resort to, in order to through religious practices, containing both performative and experiential dynamics, contribute to preserve the local cultural heritage.

Although this practice of cult is, of course, embedded by Catholic religious dimensions, the festive ritual contains in itself some performative dynamics that invites the community to take part in and develop collective practices of artistic nature, whether material, social or symbolic, namely the construction of carpets of flowers and an altar. Thus, on the one hand, *local actors* resort to social dynamics to maintain certain cultural identity traits; in turn, the *public* participates in a multifaceted sensory and emotive experiment.

Year after year, believers and tourists, natives and visitors, feed the activation of the *collective memory* of Subidouro and *enact* the preservation of their cultural heritage.

In the deserted street only traces of flowers, scents and emotions remain, and the hope that for the next year everything will be born from the ground, again.

Silence.

_____The street

SILENCE



Silence. The street lies naked and desert,
but it will not take long for this street to become crowded and bloom.

BREAKING THE SILENCE



The Fanfare of Gondomar breaks the silence, announcing that the day will be a festive one. Later, it will be back announcing that this day is the Lady of Health's day.

_____The cross

TODAY, AS ABOUT FIFTY YEARS AGO



A few minutes to nine o'clock in the morning, a man digs a hole in the place where a cross will be straightened, just as it was about fifty years ago.

A MAN IS NOT ENOUGH TO CARRY THE CROSS



A man is not enough to carry the cross. The cross is new, but the gesture is old, the path is short. Zé comes ahead, behind comes Victor. The street separates them; the street connects them. On one side, is where Victor lives, grandson of Francisco, on the other side is where Zé lived, son-in-law of João. Life and death separates Francisco and João, the first died twenty years ago, the second lives for seventy-eight years.

TWO MEN ARE NOT ENOUGH TO STRAIGHTEN THE CROSS



Two men are not enough to straighten the cross aligned with one street of the crossroads. Then, two others will observe the cross from down the street by which it must be aligned, and some other people will arrive, just as some other alignment suggestions.

CHRIST IN HANDS



A woman brings a Christ in her hands to place him on the cross.
Later, she will bring an old photograph of her dressed in white.

CHRIST WITH OPEN ARMS



A man holds the legs of the Christ with open arms, until he is attached to the cross.

_____The altar

LADDER OF THREE LEVELS INTO AN ALTAR



A few boards, some of them are loose, some others held by some nail, were placed near the cross. It won't be long, adults and children will transform this ladder of three levels into an altar.

ON A *SKY BLUE SATIN*

Some white lace towels on a *sky blue* satin draw the three levels of the wooden structure that now begins to gain the dignity of an altar.



ON THE ALTAR AND ON SOMETHING ELSE YET



The altar begins to be arranged. On the altar and *on something else yet*, another Christ aligns with other divine body composed of a human hand.

PERFUMING THE CHROMATIC ALTAR

White roses, rose and red orchids, lying in a bed of fern, hunch over from the flower jars perfuming the chromatic altar.



WHITE ON WHITE



White on white, the past in the present. In the second level of the altar, and flanked by two candles, an old photo in black and white of a young woman dressing in white balances up in front of the altar, yesterday as today, dressed in white.

_____The flowers

HEART OF PAPER



On a sheet torn out from a notebook, plans and intentions are created, sketches of lines and codes and drawings of circles within circles are made, and in the centre, a heart of paper that will soon be filled with flowers.

HEART OF FLOWERS



The heart of flowers is already drawn on the floor. Now, the last flowers of the season are aligned, and closing a circle, shrouded in an even bigger circle.

THE NAME OF THE FLOWERS



Gerberas, dianthus, orchids, roses, irises, arums, freesias, lilies, dahlias, anthuriums...

PATH OF SQUARES

The path of squares leads us to the heart of flowers. A square is a mould on which one cannot create lines nor shapes, instead one can create colour combinations, textures and scents. Soon, the squares retire quietly, leaving the way clear for the flowers.



PATH OF FLOWERS



The path of flowers extends from the axis of the heart of flowers, kept in a circle, and closes with two squares which anticipate five other guarding the *health*. Two crosses in opposite positions next to the heart of flowers give a meaning to the path of flowers.

SEVEN LITTLE GIRLS



Seven baskets of white and pink flowers await in the hands of seven little girls dressed in white and pink and ordered by their size, waiting for the Lady of Health.

LITTLE FIREFIGHTERS



Some little firefighters accommodate themselves behind the bar, it will not take long for the procession to come, repeating year after year the same salute, but still having time, year after year, for a brief snack.

_____The procession

THE TROT OF THE GUARD'S HORSES



The trot of the Guard's horses precedes the sounds of the fanfare, making way for the long retinue of politicians, clergymen, musicians, believers, litters, those who made promises and little girls dressed as saints.

LITTLE GIRLS DRESSED AS LADY OF HEALTH



Little girls dressed as Lady of Health walk on the floor of flowers flanked by adults, and anticipating the arrival of the Lady of Health.

LADY OF HEALTH COMES TO HEART



Finally, the Lady of Health's litter comes to the heart of flowers. A slight bow is enough to trigger the sound of fire engines and loosen the rockets, the rose petals in the girls' hands, the doves from their cages and tears from some female believers.

ALL FLOW FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTRE



At the end of the procession, all flow from the margins to the centre of the street, devoting with the feet and repeating the path of the Lady of Health.

_____The street

SILENCE



In the deserted street only traces of flowers, scents and emotions remain, and the hope that for the next year everything will be born from the ground, again.

Silence.

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