

***O Desterrado* by António Soares dos Reis**
Exploratory Workshop With Secondary-Level Art Students

Ana Lúcia Teixeira da Silva, University of Porto, Portugal
Emílio Remelhe, University of Porto, Portugal
Júlio Dolbeth, University of Porto, Portugal

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Abstract

We aim to present, analyze, and discuss the results obtained in an exploratory workshop with secondary-level art students centered in the sculpture *O Desterrado* by António Soares dos Reis, a sculptor who was a pensioner in Paris between 1867 and 1870, studying with professors like Jouffroy, Yvon and Taine. With this workshop, we intended to foster the ongoing research in Artistic Education's field mediated by the museum. For many of us, the Louvre Museum is practically the synonymous of *Gioconda*; the Uffizzi Gallery is *The Birth of Venus*; and the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis is *O Desterrado*, as symbols of iconicity. We took the latter as our object of study, reclaiming it from its absent status in dominant discourses, shaped by habit and the effect of belief, into a space of scientifically qualified and socially sustainable knowledge, in dialogue with the public. Addressing school-based policies, we search experience to reflect on and develop Ingold's notion of work, considering it in educational practices as a "transmission" pedagogy, embedded in educational practices for "attention". The workshop included drawing and creative writing exercises — the first focused on memory drawing, and the latter based on brainstorming through question listing — stimulating curiosity, participation, and inquiry around the artifact. The dialogue between this workshop and the research project, which includes mediation exercises and other planned actions, proved to be fertile, as it allowed us to observe reactions, emotions, interests and perspectives toward artifacts, as well as the relationship between schools and museums.

Keywords: artistic education, workshop, drawing, creative writing, *O Desterrado*

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Introduction

We believe that a critical analysis of the belief systems surrounding *O Desterrado* may foster the growth and expansion of perspectives concerning its scientific study. Personal experiences and every day, spontaneous realities can be seen as valuable contributions to cultural and social emancipation—where individuals feel integrated into the formalization of scientific knowledge about the sculpture, viewed through both an anthropological and educational lens.

Anthropology is committed to observing and describing life as we find it, but not to changing it, while art and architecture have the freedom to propose forms never before encountered, without first observing and describing what is already there (...). (Ingold, 2011, p.1)

Motivated by the desire to understand the material from which the scientific knowledge of sculpture is formed, and to distinguish it from the belief systems that shape its context, we developed a series of exercises aimed at approaching *O Desterrado* from a broader perspective—one that takes into account multiple viewpoints. Through the collection of a wide range of information, we aim not only to promote scientific knowledge around the sculpture, but also to foster an emotional and affective understanding of both the piece and its creator.

Recognizing the shared stages between art and anthropology—observing, describing, and seeking meaning—and driven by a proactive engagement with the sculpture *O Desterrado*, we participated in the workshop *O Desterrado de António Soares dos Reis*. The workshop was structured into three distinct phases: a brief introduction and presentation on the sculpture and the artist António Soares dos Reis; a memory-based exercise; and finally, a questioning exercise designed to stimulate critical thinking and analytical possibilities around the sculpture, driven by the power of inquiry.

In this way, the structured experience gathered insights and contributions that helped build knowledge around *O Desterrado*, grounded in the concerns and motivations of the participants. We believe that by encouraging a proactive and participatory attitude within the community, the resulting benefits extend beyond the sculpture itself—to the museum and its audiences as well.

O Desterrado

O Desterrado, by António Soares dos Reis, is an iconic work housed at the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis and a symbol of the city of Porto. Sculpted in Carrara marble, the piece was initiated in Rome but only completed in 1872 in Porto, the artist's hometown. In addition to the final marble version, one can also appreciate the preparatory studies in plaster and bronze, which are currently part of the collection of the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, in Lisbon.

O Desterrado is considered the masterpiece of Soares dos Reis and holds a significant place in art education, standing as one of the most important Portuguese sculptures of the 19th century. We believe its iconic status has been shaped not only by the numerous awards and recognitions received by Soares dos Reis throughout his career, but also by episodes from his tumultuous personal life. These include, for example, the controversy over whether *O*

Desterrado was a copy of the statue of Ares at the Baths of Diocletian in Rome, or the case of the *Bust of the Englishwoman*, which—despite having been paid for—was never claimed by the sitter, who did not identify with the austere portrayal created by Soares dos Reis.

For the making of this sculpture, Soares dos Reis was inspired by the poem *As Tristezas do Desterro* (The Sorrows of Exile) by Alexandre Herculano (1810–1877). The figure's solitary posture evokes the Romantic imagination, expressing a deep sense of *saudade* and nostalgia, and reflecting the close emotional and historical relationship between the Portuguese people and the sea. It is worth noting that the sculpture's interlaced hands were modelled from a cast taken of the artist's own hands.

Figure 1

O Desterrado (1872), António Soares dos Reis



National Museum Soares dos Reis

Methodology

Public

The workshop was held at the Escola Artística Soares dos Reis, in the city of Porto (Soares dos Reis Artistic School), on January 16th, 2025, and involved 12th-grade students from the Communication Design course.

Activities' Structure

O Desterrado was followed by a series of exercises involving the participants in hands-on experimentation—one focused on drawing from memory, and a second based on questioning, aimed at generating critical reflection on the various contexts surrounding the sculpture. In the final phase, the results were discussed among the participants in order to reflect on their perceptions and the directions taken by the students in response to the theme presented.

Data Collection Methods

The method used for data collection in this workshop was observation, through which we gathered feedback on participants' reactions and the questions they raised, opening new avenues for reflection around the sculpture *O Desterrado* by António Soares dos Reis. Additionally, this experience allowed us to observe the diversity of relationships established by the participants—both with the sculpture and with its creator—enabling an assessment of

new and alternative materials within the scope of educational practices in museum settings. Finally, a photographic record was made of all the outcomes produced during the two exercises carried out by the students.

Framing

Although it is constructed upon logical concepts and widely recognized by the community, some of the knowledge surrounding *O Desterrado* lacks scientific evidence or verification. Nonetheless, these beliefs are considered part of the conceptual framework and help sustain the relationship between the museum and its audiences, as well as between the public and the artefacts themselves.

It seems common for audiences to arrive at a museum with certain expectations—we encounter prominent pieces that, whether driven by our imagination or by campaigns developed by the museum itself, capture our interest in more subtle or immediate ways.

This workshop aimed to bring art and science closer together, while also distinguishing between them. Our intention was to propose a creative approach *with* and *of* science, contributing material that could make it more diverse and as comprehensive as possible. We understand scientific knowledge as an ever-evolving body of information that must be regularly updated. By merging reason and emotion, personal experiences and multiple perspectives, we discover new means and approaches to understanding the sculpture *O Desterrado*. Something that may appear static within the museum space is transformed within our imagination.

Acknowledging that human beings are shaped by the learning, relationships, creativity, and communication they develop with one another, we highlight the need for knowledge to be constructed in a structured and inclusive way, adapting to the prevailing conditions of contemporary society. In this sense, we believe that the sculpture *O Desterrado* reveals itself as unfinished. We maintain that opinions, beliefs, and all idealizations formed within the realm of imagination regarding a given object allow us to question and activate the necessary tools to assess its possible integration into the domain of science.

Objectives

Our primary goal was to create a meaningful connection between the students, the museum, and the sculpture *O Desterrado*. To achieve this, we designed conditions that supported more independent and critical forms of interaction with art. At the same time, we provided tools intended to help students reflect on the sculpture in practical terms, encouraging an emancipated and autonomous approach. Finally, we also tested different strategies and exercises aimed at supporting the process of knowledge construction around the sculpture, using both visual and verbal methods.

Context

The workshop took place at the Escola Artística Soares dos Reis, in Porto, as part of the celebration of the school's 140th anniversary. It was included in the programme of *Viva' Soares* week—an open week during which the school welcomes the broader community, inviting professionals from various disciplines and offering lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and a range of artistic interventions.

First Exercise

Participants in the workshop were challenged to draw *O Desterrado* from memory, in a quick sketch lasting approximately three minutes. In doing so, we encouraged students to develop a personal and emotional connection with the sculpture, grounded in their own individual memory.

We observed several elements that persisted in memory and appeared consistently across most of the representations, such as the crossed leg, the bowed head, and the interlaced hands. Acknowledging the sculpture's plasticity and recognizing the importance and symbolism of the hand, we allowed space for speculation and ritualistic interpretations—pointing to the possibility that the hand stands as a symbolic marker in *O Desterrado*, one that bridges scientific knowledge and the realm of belief.

Figure 2

Results From the First Exercise

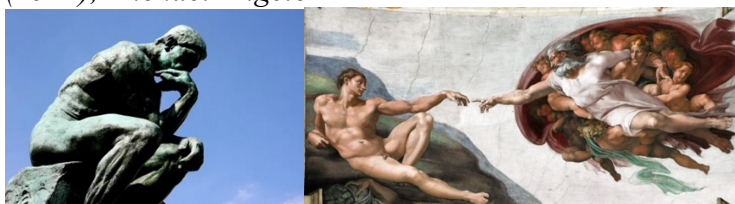


The students proposed the hypothesis that the hands of the sculpture might constitute the most significant symbolic element of the work, representing the delicate boundary between scientific knowledge and the beliefs that shape the symbolic universe of *O Desterrado*. These elements exist for concrete reasons, whether due to physical necessity or to discursive and/or thematic considerations related to the work itself. Indeed, by using his own hands as a mold for creating the sculpture, Soares dos Reis opened a space for the formation of beliefs and a collective imagination that transcend the technical aspects to be evaluated during the formalization of the sculpture as his final residency project.

O Desterrado is not an isolated case; there are numerous works that create a collective imagination around the positioning of bodies and, specifically, the expressiveness of hands—examples include Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker* and Michelangelo's painting *The Creation of Adam*.

Figure 3

Le Penseur [*The Thinker*] (1904), Rodin and Creazione di Adamo [*The Creation of Adam*] (1511), Michael Angelo



Considering the context and dating of *O Desterrado*, we understand that it is related to poetry and that its creation was conceived from molds—a common practice between the 18th and 19th centuries. However, by using his own hands as a mold, and given the affinity between the sculpture and its sculptor, additional substance is added that feeds into the spectrum of beliefs surrounding the work. It is important to note that the hand, as an organ, carries the marks of the past—such as scars—and serves as confirmation of one’s own existence and individuality; it is in the hands that we find fingerprints, the irrefutable means of identification that we possess.

Drawing is not merely the control of hand muscles; it involves mental processes and, in this case, memory structuring. In agreement with Silva (2021), it constitutes a system of relationships between object and concept, container and content, meaning and signifier, matter and expression.

By privileging drawing as a dialogue and viewing it as a mode of reflection without concern for perfect lines, we consider it a representation of thought, promoting and facilitating the learning of knowledge about the subject. Thus, drawing can be part of the process in which the ability to present and develop a problem or idea is demonstrated, serving as a tool for problematization capable of capturing content and procedures. Consequently, the results supported the idea that form perpetuates itself in the present and future as an icon and representation of the collective imagination. Despite its materiality, *O Desterrado* finds part of its meaning in the language and signs it conveys to its viewers.

By adopting an active and interventionist stance, we can analyze these same symbols more deeply and expand the scope of study surrounding their context. It is incumbent upon us to explore the sculpture in a transdisciplinary manner and thus enrich the body of scientific knowledge surrounding it.

Second Exercise

The second exercise developed from speculation around a central question: could questioning lead to a broader knowledge capable of benefiting all involved? Through the formulation of new perspectives, viewpoints, and idealizations, the students were encouraged to explore different dimensions of the sculpture, assuming an active role as observers.

According to Brun (1991), the possible origin of writing may stem from drawing, transformed into ideograms, then into characters or words formed by letters. We therefore decided to follow this very trajectory for this workshop. If the first phase was devoted to drawing, it seemed ideal to evolve it and organize a second phase centered on writing. Thus, the most challenging moment proved to be the most enriching.

Despite initial reluctance and doubts about completing the task, a considerable number of students managed to achieve the goal. Drawing on Michael J. Gelb’s (1999) method of 100 questions, we opened space for exploratory questioning around *O Desterrado* by António Soares dos Reis. Based on Leonardo da Vinci’s curiosity and procedures, Gelb explains:

Why one hundred questions? The first twenty or so will be spontaneous. In the next twenty or thirty, themes will begin to emerge, and in the last part of the second half of the list you are likely to discover unexpected but profound material. (Gelb, M., 1999, p. 59)

Our intention here is not specifically to validate this estimate, but to place trust in a proactive and useful working tool through this assertion of effectiveness by the author.

Beyond formal and aesthetic questions related to the sculpture and its formalization, the lists proved quite diverse, revealing a general trend reflected by the participants: concerns about whether Soares dos Reis was financially stable or had other work complementing sculpture. Thus, we understand that as 12th-grade students, on the verge of choosing higher education paths, their own anxieties surfaced.

Our goal was to expand the universe of concerns, without any intention of having their questions answered. The only instruction given was that there were no limits to their questioning and that they could do so informally, whether directed at the sculpture or at Soares dos Reis. We also assumed that the time for the first phase would be determined by the participant who completed the list of 100 questions first. The exercise became a competition among all—three students finished the list simultaneously, so we moved on to the next phase: reducing the list to only 10 questions each considered most pertinent.

There was no criterion or constraint; each student chose according to their own method which questions would advance to the next phase. Some lists narrowed down to a single theme; others seemed more dispersed, with very different questions; some reflected personal concerns; others expressed disturbances that appeared to belong to the sculpture itself.

With the lists reduced to only 10 questions, these showed a closer relation to the realm of artistic education—they frequently associated the sculpture with painting and addressed formal, technical, and aesthetic issues.

Figure 4

Results From the Second Exercise



Given the limited time and the growing enthusiasm of all participants, we quickly moved to the final phase — choosing the question they would most like to see answered by *O Desterrado* itself or by Soares dos Reis. The questions were related to the following categories:

Posture of the sculpture: Why are the hands crossed? Why is it bent over? Why is it not standing upright? Why is the head tilted? Was this position chosen by the artist or was it part of the exercise?

Materials, techniques, and creative processes: Why is the sculpture life-sized? Why does the rock include maritime elements? What materials were used? What tools were employed? How was the process carried out? How does light interact with the artwork? Since the piece is part of the Romantic movement, do people tend to think that Soares dos Reis wanted to portray his own emotions? Would you prefer it to be a painting? Why this name? Are there any records of Soares dos Reis's notes for the statue project? The cracks appear on the "shadowed" side of the statue — was this intentional? If so, does it lend a poetic aura to the work? Did you depict the character realistically or exaggerate facial and bodily features to achieve perfection?

Conservation status: Why are some parts yellowed? Has any restoration been carried out?

Social context: Why is the figure a man? What social class do you belong to? Do you think artificial intelligence influences art?

Aspirations, concerns, and mental health: Does the figure feel lonely? Why did you choose the arts? What are your life goals? What would you change in your life? What do you think of yourself?

Following the final list of questions, a brief discussion took place regarding the results. This approach reveals a balance between reason and emotion, as students posed questions from the spectrum of reason—such as composition, material, or form—as well as questions from the emotional realm, which could relate to the sculpture, the artist, or even personal interests or experiences.

Participants were able to reflect questions spanning very different spheres within social, economic, and/or political frameworks, developing discussions around the idea and formalisation of what truly constitutes an icon. This activity made it possible to observe the articulation of participants' critical discourse emerging from their individual curiosities. Our objective focused on creating an exploratory moment aimed at raising questions and expanding pre-existing spaces of reflection and/or creating new ones that might foster public interest in the sculpture and the institution that houses it.

Structure

The experience we acquire throughout life is also influenced by the wisdom that is transmitted to us, since knowledge is information and individuals operate as mechanisms capable of processing it. Assuming that knowledge consists of learning skills, we can understand that, as human beings, we represent a field of perceptions that can be put into practice. In this way, we recognize that knowledge, beyond a set of accumulated representations, also reflects the concept of the education of attention, explored by Tim Ingold.

The author brings anthropology closer to education—and even to art—arguing that creative processes are continuous and require constant mutation. According to him, the goal of anthropology is to seek a generous, comparative, yet critical understanding of human beings and the knowledge about the world they inhabit.

Ingold criticizes the traditional view of teaching and learning as mere transmission of knowledge, as well as the conception of the school as the only space where knowledge can be

obtained. He considers the classroom more than an instruction space; it should be a place where the educator provides tools capable of inspiring, guiding, and encouraging critical thinking in the search for truth.

Modern education is governed by the ideal that the student, starting from a state of ignorance, should have access to explanations that will eventually empower and enable them to emerge as an independent thinker, emancipated from past conventions and prejudices. Education, as currently practiced, often presents itself as a passage from ignorance to intellect. However, from Tim Ingold's perspective, learning is only possible through the transformation of this state into an education of attention.

Education of attention is equivalent to tuning our perceptual system, as it is directed toward essential aspects of the surrounding environment. Assuming that the educational process is related to mental processes, it consequently reconciles intentionality and attention—that is, individuals associate mental content with physical features of the world. This process occurs gradually with experience; in other words, education is based on attention and not on transmission, as commonly understood, since it encompasses knowledge, values, beliefs, and practices perpetuated by society.

(...) transmission closes life off, confining it to the replication of existing routines. At best, it is a model of training, not education. (Ingold, 2018, p. 20)

Drawing on the concept of habit, explored by Dewey, Ingold shows that every experience modifies the one who undergoes it and the quality of subsequent experiences. Therefore, life is a process, and the way we conduct it reveals itself as a task of education—attention becomes a priority in how we find ourselves in the world, and it is through habit that our posture relates to others.

Ingold also points to the possibilities of formulating knowledge through experimentation, similar to how children learn their mother tongue. This same dichotomy is found between drawing and writing. From this approach, we consider the subject as an emerging participant in the construction of knowledge.

In educational practice, we find a mesh of lines under the concept of continuity, which differs from the idea of a network—where only connections are highlighted. Under the concept of a mesh, we follow the movement and relation that represents the path traced by a line among intertwined concepts—our own steps—in a given environment. The places where these lines meet or connect are contact zones, where knowledge moves and grows along them. Thus, solutions are not always predictable. Things constitute themselves in relation to the environment, so representing them as isolated lines is a simplified interpretation of understanding them.

Conclusion

This workshop benefited from several contributions aimed at applying art education within both school and museum contexts. Within the drawing/writing binomial, common concerns emerged; that is, through different tools, we achieved the workshop's objective. By engaging new ways of thinking about the sculpture, we expanded its learning spectrum, seeking to broaden and diversify the mediating and educational tools. We believe that an interdisciplinary approach always benefits the interests and expectations of diverse audiences

in relation to an artifact—in this case, the sculpture *O Desterrado* by António Soares dos Reis.

We found that drawing served as an introductory step that led to questioning and sparked curiosity among the participants. Most participants focused on the object of study by raising questions about the sculpture's form and/or content, as well as conceptual and formal aspects. Additionally, questions related to loneliness, sadness, and feelings and/or sensations arose, both regarding the sculpture and its author. Participants also expressed personal concerns, wondering, for example, whether the sculptor had financial difficulties, if he had other sources of income besides sculpture, or if he saw the arts as a secure future path. Thus, we infer that beyond the specific context, the students' age group and background partially influenced their interpretations of the sculpture.

The dialogue between this workshop and the broader research project—which includes mediation exercises and other pre-planned activities—proved fruitful. It allowed us to observe reactions, emotions, interests, and perspectives related to the sculpture, as well as the relationship between the school and the museum. In this way, we created spaces, encouraged knowledge production, and provided tools that expanded the perspective on *O Desterrado*.

The activities were dynamic and engaging, and the discussions among participants significantly enriched the workshop, promoting critical thinking and encouraging the problematization of different frameworks. For these reasons, we believe we have broadened our understanding and improved the conditions for our ongoing research work and study, in favor of art education and mediation within the Museum.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Contact emails: analucia.apteixeira.silva@gmail.com
eremelhe@fba.up.pt
jdolbeth@fba.up.pt