

# Visual essay: inês, the divine relict

## Abstract

This visual essay investigates the language encoded by the clothing represented in the epic tales and narratives about D. Inês de Castro and D. Pedro I, highlighting the tomb effigies, legends and chronicles related to the theme, analyzing the visual and symbolic codes belonging to these, as well as the memories associated with iconography. It presents the performance as a dressed language, how and which codes we can reveal of the character through the costume scene.

**Keywords:** scenically language, Inez de Castro, visual essay, costume design, performance

Volume 8 Issue 5 - 2022

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**Received:** October 10, 2022 | **Published:** November 03, 2022

## Introduction

The present article presents the creative process concepts of the photographic essay *Inês Divino Relict*. Addressing the reference points of the history of Inês de Castro, posthumous queen, second wife of D. Pedro I of Portugal, approaching sensitive topics of the narratives and tales of her memory, as well as elements of the iconography of the Middle Ages, time of her life, that could contribute as inspiration for the codification of the new language of the created character.

To demonstrate the points of mnemonic and sensorial support approached in the production of the photograph, considering the aspects of the scenic dramatic game and concepts of construction of costumes, by exposing elements of scenic semiology, the methods and practices applied in the creative act. When analyzing the approach to the scenic construction of the photo, in relation to the elements of clothing, gesture, positioning, body movement, lighting, and aesthetic treatment, the iconographic and semiological concepts applied in the photo essay. In order to observe from the result, the form of communication of the language proposed in the final photograph, considering the creative process of building the imagery atmosphere of the research, the transformation of the model into the character during the photo session, and the language created after editing and treatment of the final photograph. Therefore, this work aims to present some aspects of the scenic language and especially the strength of the costume as elements that encode memories, through the analysis of the working method of artistic experimentation based on cultural memory (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Photographic performance, 2021, model Milena Azevedo, own photography.

The photo essay proposes a dialectical relationship between the costume, the gesture, and the mythical narrative of the epic character. According to Aumont,<sup>1</sup> the artistic form of photography presents in its image the plane of expression and the plane of content, from which we can identify some constituent aspects of the formation of the message. Through the dimensions of the plastic signs of the image, we observe the set of elements that gradually build values of composition, historical references, and clothing that constitute significant communicators. In addition to the materiality of the expressiveness of the sensitivity transmitted by the gradation of light, posture and gestures, textures, among other aspects.

The performance represents Inês de Castro, a historical character, of the Portuguese royal house of the medieval period, second wife of King D. Pedro I, first lady-in-waiting to D. Constança, first wife of D. Pedro I, her death in 1349 contains an element of mystery, since 1345, as a result of the birth of D. Fernando I, his departure from the scene four years before what would have happened, a fact that promoted more strength and demonstrates more time for the love of Pedro and Inês could freely bloom without compacting it in just five years and, above all, it gave more leeway to Inês' four pregnancies in that short period".<sup>2</sup>

Fernão Lopes narrates in his chronicles that, in June 1361, in Cantanhede, D. Pedro "swore to the Gospels, bodily touched by him, that, being an infant, still living the King and he being in Bragança, he could have had a little more seven years. or at least, not waking up from the day and month, which he had received from his wife as a gift, as commanded by the Holy Church, Dona Inês de Castro, the daughter of Dom Pedro Fernandez de Castro. And that this Dona Inês had received him for her husband by similar words and that, after the said reception, he had always had her for his wife until the time of his death, both living in common and becoming married as they should" The chronicles of Fernão Lopes.<sup>3</sup> The inspirational character, described as the Galician, "the noblest lady, who participated in the blood of the greatest houses in Portugal",<sup>4</sup> endowed with "rare beauty and such extreme grace", is the owner of a narrative full of mysticism, intrigue and drama, starting with the secret marriage, his assassination ordered by King D. Afonso IV, the subsequent justice carried out by D. Pedro and the ceremonial transfer from the Monastery of Santa Clara to Acabaça, "made in the so-called Church of Alcobaça, two sepulchers of white marble and of artificial workmanship with a variety of sculpted figures", the magical narrative of the posthumous coronation as queen, reported in different ways through the chronicles, D. Pedro

*“He had that corpse of beloved beauty unearthed, and dressed, and with a golden crown on his head, so that he would reign dead in the nostalgia of the Portuguese as he had reigned alive in his soul, he ordered him to be placed in a chair placed on the royal throne, and all those who they were gifts they kissed her hand, like Queen; and after this ceremony had been carried out on a precious litter, or stilts, covered with a richly decorated cloth, whose very well-trimmed ends I dragged to the ground, he was taken to the said Royal Monastery of Alcobaça, accompanied, with the greatest pomp and magnificence of all”.*<sup>4</sup>

The essay: Inês divine Relict, is a performance that represents the sanctification of the regal figure of D. Inês de Castro, associated with the magical character of the romantic narrative between D. Pedro I of Portugal and the post-mortem crowned queen. Inspired by the mnemonic narratives consulted, such as those of D. Pedro I and his testimony of honour to the bones of D. Inês, and the construction of a “white stone mound, all very delicately crafted, with her image on the crown tomb in her head as if she were queen”.<sup>3</sup>

The performance is installed in the spirit of the transportation of his body from the Monastery of Santa Clara to the Monastery of Alcobaça, made with the greatest honour possible, in a procession between knights, noblemen, ladies and maidens and clergy, walking a path between lit candles as Fernão Lopes narrates, the chronicler’s narrative also evokes the romantic poetic memory of the pre-Raphaelites and their idealized vision of the medieval in nineteenth-century artistic representations.

Most noble lady, who shared the blood of the greatest Houses in Portugal. Figueiredo,<sup>4</sup> had been exalted in its postmortem momentum, in demonstration of true love, having its translation marked in narratives and fables as the “most extraordinary, and of greater honour, and solemnity than until then, and even later in Portugal. saw” rests beside his love, in the Church of Alcobaça in a “tomb of very white marble, and of artificial craftsmanship with a variety of carved figures, and carved in half relief”. D. Pedro I had “that corpse of beloved beauty, and clothed, and with a crown of gold on his head, that he might reign dead in the memories of the Portuguese, just as he had reigned alive in his soul, he ordered him to be placed on a chair placed on a throne. Royal and all who were present kissed her hand, like Queen”, placed in a precious litter, covered with a very rich decorated material, whose very well-furnished ends dragged to the ground, was taken to the said Monastery.<sup>4</sup>

The essay presents the “more or less supernatural luminous halo”<sup>1</sup> that emanates from the mythical image of Inês, representation presents the “auritic status” of the drama of the regal memories and the scenic moment of the described ceremony, the troubled royal relationships are exposed in the heart, the centre of the costume opening a relic, D. Inês placed as a reliquary of strength and spirituality, a combination between the royal conflict and the love that conquered death “there was rarely found in someone a love as great as that which King D. Pedro had for D. Inês, [...] there is no love as true as the one for whom the great space of time does not make the deceased loved one lose their memory”<sup>3</sup> attempts to portray symbolic and sensitive aspects of the glorification of the figure, in sanctification associated with the magical character of the narrative, carried by the weight of the long red dress and the memory of the silhouette of the noble medieval costume, royal blood and conflict. The character and her heart as a space for reliquary and spiritual illumination in the face of affective relationships. The knots of royal blood relationships open to the illumination of the divine aura of the mythical figure of D. Inês.

The figure of D. Pedro I’s second wife was built as a devotional relict, a symbol of strength and spirituality, and to portray symbolic

and sensitive aspects of the glorification of the figure, in sanctification associated with the magical character of the posthumous queen’s iconography.

The posture and gestures connect the figure to the language of liberation from internal strength, the central opening that symbolizes the strength of the feeling that broke the barrier of death, the garments translate the noble sign of its lineage. Her head is adorned with a crown of divine light, with protection and spiritual strength. On the arms, light translucent and shiny sleeves compose the character’s magical and mystical character.

The performance represents Inês’ memory personification of tales and fables that crossed time, it reflects an intention to dignify her memory, so constructed in the popular imagination by theatrical chronicles and narratives. Some aspects of the visual narrative created were composed of the imaginary that feeds on the reserves<sup>5</sup> of chronicles’ repertoires.

The investigation started from the characters’ chronicles and tomb memories, using the concept of familiar symbols, psychological and physical aspects represented through the narratives, and iconographic representations transported to the formal aspects of the costumes and the scene in order to create the “field effect of force” or “magnet for the eyes”,<sup>6</sup> in the sense of communicating through signs. Through gestures, costumes and props, we can promote the production of meanings, in order to provoke a fabulous scenic intention. Because these elements bring in them a playful, symbolic character, and can also be seen as the materialization of emotion from the character’s legend.

The use and choice of forms in the performance dialogued directly with the meanings and intentions of the scene of the photographic taking. The production involved the development of creative perception and technical skills in the use of materials, shapes and meanings to elucidate that the “experience of the emotions of the soul, all its tragic nature, is not separate from the internal experience of shapes, which in turn is indissoluble from the content”.<sup>7</sup> Creating from the costumes and gestures the sensitive and real material layer of the character, so that the observer can feel the real presence of the fantastic persona. Forming a mythical dimension in which the costume and its accessories, inspire and affect the gesture, movement, framing and lighting, among other aspects, in order to create a particular spirit to the performance. The movement and body postures were intended to compose a dramatic force in the scene. Therefore, the scene design of this photographic performance “aims to clarify the character’s movements and relationships, to participate directly in the meaning of the drama, while stimulating the viewer’s fantasy, which will mentally ‘complete’ the environments”.<sup>8</sup> In the sense of composing the costume as the main object of sensory stimulation and message encoder. Through it, enabling the reading of symbolic plastic signs, just as Barthes demonstrates to be present in the coded transmission of the image to viewers.

The embodied narrative of D. Inês highlights the costume as a field of visual force for the transmitted message, the choice of textures, shapes and contrasts built a set of signs that composed the intention of the legendary persona represented. It used situations, gestures, and uses of the body as a cultural object,<sup>5</sup> using associated messages, articulating a set of sources and codes, suggesting to the observer the construction of the message through photography rhetoric. The codes are transmitted by the aesthetic and symbolic value of the photographic message, the gestures, the contrasts of tones, textures, shapes, poses, among other aspects present in the procedures of photographic connotation.<sup>9</sup>

The essay considers iconographic elements constructed through the pose, the attitude of the performer, and the costume, since “photography is only significant insofar as there is a reserve of stereotyped attitudes that constitute elements of already established meaning”.<sup>9</sup> Through a historical grammar of the iconographic connotation in the search for materials in the associations of ideas and metaphors. The complementation of meaning is composed by the adornments and parts of the garment, constituting elements of meaning, discontinuous and complete in themselves. And also through the use of photogenic lighting and effects used in photography.

The created image contains a symbolic vision that both the human figure and the scene follow an affective criterion and demonstrate situations that reveal the continuity between the internal world and the external world of the epic narrative and the construction of the image itself. It is a representation and not a replica, not needing to be “identical to the motif”<sup>10</sup> but it intends to represent the other, with the intention of triggering similar reactions, that is, it seeks the perception of the mental image generated from the contact with the texts.

Everything in the representation is symbolic from the selection of the different visual aspects: details are many or few, magnitudes, positions, proximity or distances, the confluence or separation of objects, intense or attenuated colors of the contrasts, and the proportions of the costume shapes, the areas straight lines of the wavy areas and the open areas in continuous proportions and provides interrupted proportions point the entire relationship established follows an intimate hierarchy that has as a criterion the affective internal situation towards the captured narrative point therefore when representing the figure of Mrs. Inês de Castro. It proposes to objectively document the way in which she expresses it from the mythical construction of her world through tales and textual information is captured over time.

### Exploration of the experimental sensibility of character space

The exploratory activity of the visual essay sought to build a body with experiences resulting from cultural constructions, the cultural body bearing different signs that dialogue with values belonging to the culture and narratives in question.

The representative image idealized in the performance essay demonstrates the narrative character of the reference’s expression plane, even though “the narrated event is of little amplitude”.<sup>1</sup> In this way, we can analyze the content of the photograph according to Aumont’s<sup>1</sup> concept that it contains an organized set of signifiers, whose meanings constitute a new narrative possibility of the fragments of royal history presented in tales and epic writings.

Analyzing the method and the nature of the creative act according to Salles,<sup>11</sup> we must verify the series of operations responsible for the logical development of the investigation of performative photography in question. The cultural body developed contains layers of meanings obtained through sensations and connections created from the capture of textual data transferred to the visual image, in experiments with illustrations and collages that mapped the meaning of patterning, to later develop the costume inspired by the Middle Age, time in which the character lived, and the auratic relationship of his history over time, are revealed by the association with the holy signs of spiritual enlightenment. We could observe as a result, a construction based on the connection between the mythical and the epic.

The construction of the figurative element is directly correlated with the communicator himself in the scene/performer in the creation of the “gestural force”<sup>7</sup> as the main communicator. Its action and the

creator orientation given an idea imagined in the illustrations, through an intention to stylize and transform into specific aspects of the poetics contained in the proposal.

To Pavis,<sup>12</sup> the physical aspect of the performer represents the sign of her own presence, during the photographic session, while it emerged in the sensorial layers of the character, we could see the relationships between them, and relate to the concept of “dramatic play”, and as the model perception of the character emotional weight. Then we started to observe the exchange of identities, the body gestures, the look, and physical positioning were embodied and built the language of the climate of the situation.

In the scenic space, the actor is a human body, whose expressive power will increase as it maintains relations of complicity and antagonism with other scenic signs.<sup>7</sup> In view of this note, we should observe the experimental sensitivity of space and character, through the construction of the model, the costume and the space, reduced and spatially simplified, leads to the costume as the most relevant coding element, in order to emphasize the character and his actions. Inês works with the forms of clothing and leads us to look at the most significant point, the heart of a holy queen that brings with it the values obtained through the representations of the tales, from her tragic death to the love relationship and royal conflicts over her position and descent, a figure sometimes disliked by some and sometimes glorified by others, which contains without itself the sacred and the profane, represented in the form of a devotional reliquary, with relics contained in the chest.

The costume in this essay is the performer’s creative tool, which gives meaning to the garment’s forms as she interacts with it. Payne<sup>13</sup> points out the value of the relationship between staging, performer, direction, acting and scenography, in the work presented this relationship is interdependent.

Regarding the way of dressing meanings, let us observe the relationship between the adornment and the volume of the dress, as there is no royal crown, but a shiny metallic cloak of medieval inspiration and the adornment in the form of a halo of the aura sanctified illumination of the character. The heavy royal cloak gives way to the vast volume of skirt and sleeves, which hang and fold over themselves, contributing to the hieratic and majestic bearing of the figure. The performer’s awareness of the character’s representation transforms the model into Inês, making her real through the use of the costume and the aesthetic treatment, thus building the “truth of the character”.<sup>14</sup>

The costume was developed containing the notion of “formality” in the sense of preserving the forms “both in the institutional meaning of the term and in the visual”,<sup>6</sup> making the individual merge into the pattern, the reference of medieval historical clothing intended to preserve the royal institution of the figure, the silhouette inspired by illustrations of the Portuguese royal family tree and historical references of fashion to compose the formal basis of the project.

Accordingly, the exploratory activity, the layers, the cultural body, and the symbolic references were combined in order to transform an old meaning, be transferred and transformed in order to designate a new concept,<sup>6</sup> applied in the construction of the costume of the character, using the appropriation of signs and transforming them into a new meaning that dialogues with the character’s profile.

### Conclusion

The forms created both in the body and in space constitute the way in which our awareness becomes, simultaneously, the form of

lived or felt experiences and images of the apprehended contents, which intimately affected the creation process, feelings, ideas, the values transformed into a physical spatial form and how to express and communicate to others what has been intuitively translated into images in space.

Cultural memory was the base structure of the process of creating the scenic photographic performance of this essay, from which the network of signs and connections was built, supported by the sensorial context of the consulted narratives and tales. In order to create the fabled scenic intention of the character, through the gestural experimentation of the body with the costume, the volumes and intentional cuts, with the purpose of the interaction of movement, the large-scale adornments to expand the form and reinforce the dramatic senses together with contrasts and lighting points.

The strength of the image resides in the combination of the costume as a creative tool of the model/performer, who seeks communication through body gestures, the set of movement of the seated figure's torso and the lighting, building the dramatic game of the constituted scene while the model embodies aspects of the character, and feels the auratic atmosphere of her story, narrated by the designer, and guided by illustration studies that are part of the performance creation process.

The proposal of the dramatic photographic essay was the construction of the mythical image idealized through the times and narratives. In order to create a “dynamic process in which the concrete experience, the experience of reality”<sup>15</sup> was reformulated, its reference patterns changed, outdating the previous patterns without destroying them, thus “converting the experience performed in the reference” to restructure itself, under new imagery references by the construction of the fabled character of the posthumous queen who contains the mythical force sheltered in the chest, as a venerable relic, sheltered in the sanctified reliquary of the heart that guards the light and divinity of the figure represented.<sup>16,17</sup>

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Research and Studies Group in Sciences of Art and Heritage - “Francisco de Holanda” – CIEBA and National Theater and Dance Museum of Portugal for the support for this research work.

## Funding

This work is financed by national funds through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, i.p., under the project UIDB/04042/2020 and doctoral research fellowship PRT/BD/152875/2021.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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