OLD GOA REVELATIONS
New insights and interpretations on the Vice-Roys of "Estado da Índia" portrait Gallery

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Introduction
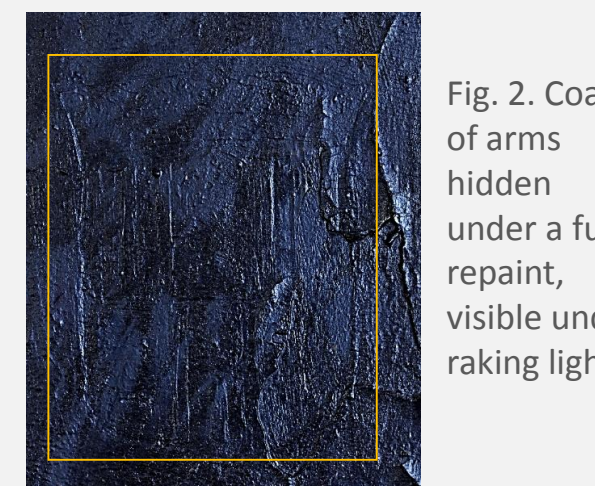
Fig. 1. Fieldwork in ASI Museum, Old Goa, India

Fig. 2. Coat of arms hidden under a full repaint, visible under raking light.

Fig. 3. Most portraits have diferent underlying textures.

This Gallery depicts all the Vice-Roys and Governors of Estado da India territories, under Portuguese administration from 1505 until 1961. It was first commissioned by Vice-Roy D. João de Castro, in 1547, with the clear intention to glorify the Portuguese Empire and their military and diplomatic achievements overseas. It's constituted by 120 portraits, 71 exposed in Archaeological Survey of India Museum (Old Goa) and 2 in Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Lisboa). The older paintings are covered with several layers of repaints, added through several renovation interventions overtime and this condition doesn't allow their correct identification and interpretation, which rises authenticity issues.

Main Goals

Fig. 4. X-Ray from the portrait of Afonso de Albuquerque, showing two overlaped faces, 1953 © ACR-DGPC

Fig. 5. Non-destructive analyses to the portrait of Albuquerque in MNAA, 2013. © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC

This phD project intends to develop a multidisciplinary scientific approach which will allow the revelation of the underlying figures through digital processes, as well as collecting new data regarding their historic, artistic and technical characterization. Crossing scientific data with archival documentation and multidisciplinary expertise will allows us to have a new interpretation of this collection, using non-destructive techniques, thus preventing misinformed restoration interventions. A process successfully conducted in the portrait identified as Afonso de Albuquerque from Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisboa.
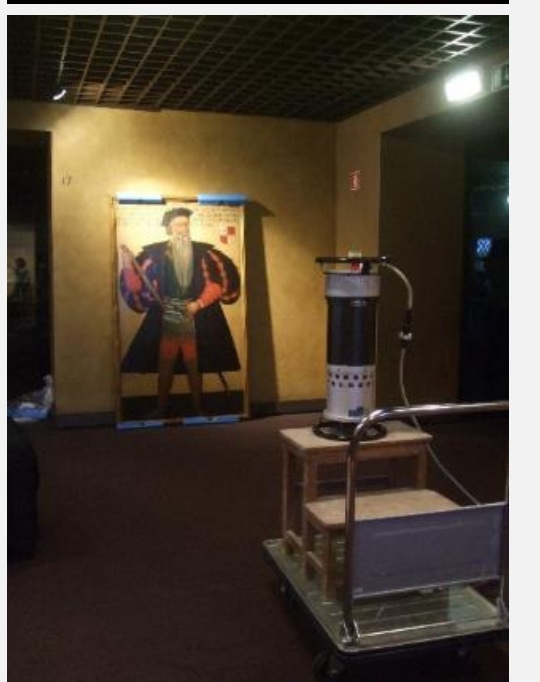
Figs. 6-7. Photographic and radiographic exams to the portrait of Albuquerque in MNAA, 2013. © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC

Methodology

The Old Goa Revelations project aims to ensure the interpretation of the various layers present in the older portraits without having to resort to irreversible physical interventions or destructive analysis through the following work stages:

1) Technical documentation and area exams
Multispectral survey of the surface of the paintings by photographic processes (visible light, raking light, UV fluorescence, IV Reflectography) and radiographic (X-ray), in order to obtain images of underlying layers and other technical and material information by exposing the materials present in the painting to different electromagnetic waves.

2) Conservation diagnosis report
Complete survey of the state of conservation of the support and surface layers of the paintings and their frames, together with the ASI conservators, including registration of pathologies and other details through macro-photographs and microphotographs.

3) Non-destructive analysis
Carry out analyses for preliminary identification of the chemical composition of pigments and mediums by visible emission spectrometry / colorimetry, infrared spectrometry and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF).

4) Laboratory study and data processing;
Processing of all data collected in-situ and comparing it with archive documentation, in particular the chronology of interventions and old reproductions, in order to obtain the correct identification of the figures represented in the various layers present, as well as the historical, artistic, technical and material characterization of the portraits studied.

5) Solutions for re-interpretation of the collection
Development of solutions that can benefit the correct interpretation of the collection by the common visitor and that reflect/disseminate the study carried out.

Study-case: portrait of Afonso de Albuquerque/ Lopo Soares de Albergaria

Figs. 8-9. Portrait identified as Afonso de Albuquerque before and after restoration intervention (1953-56). The restored painting didn't resemble the mythic figure of Albuquerque © ACR - DGPC.

Figs. 10-11. The removal of repaints proved the existence of overlapped pictorical layers and revealed a diferent coat of arms in the primitive layer. © ACR – DGPC.

The portrait of Afonso de Albuquerque was one of the six paintings of the collection that was restored in Lisbon between 1953-1956. The conservators soon understood that the primitive figure and its coat of arms didn't match his iconography (Fig.12). After a complex episode between the Museum of Ancient Art and the political authorities, the conservators were ordered to repaint the figure to look more like Albuquerque.
Recent exams made to this portrait (Figs. 6, 7; 11-16) allowed the observation of underlying information, wich revealed the figure of the Governor who succeded Albuquerque, Lopo Soares de Albergaria, after comparison with archival documentation. (Fig. 17)

Fig.12. Reproduction of Albuquerque's portrait by Resende, c. 1635. © British Library

Fig.13. Portrait identified as Albuquerque, MNAA, 2013 © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC

Fig.14. Ultra-Violet Fluorescence, revealing the beard aditions from the late 50's in bright blue © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC, 2013

Fig.15. Infra-Red Reflectography, revealing underdrawings in the left foot and in the coat os arms © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC, 2013
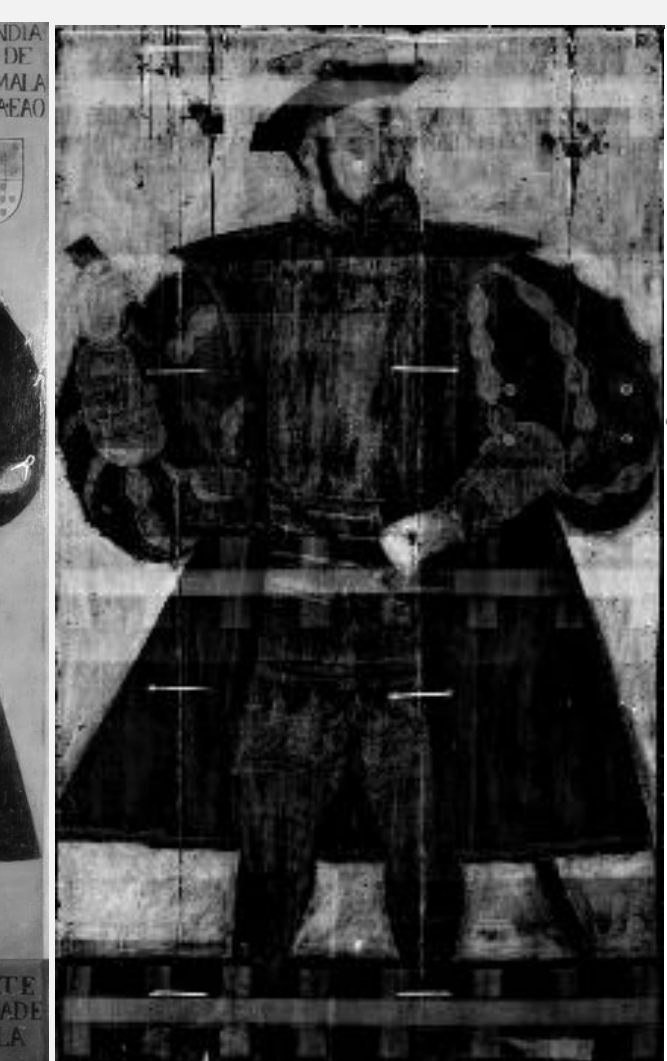
Fig. 16. X-Rays revealing a diferent face and coat of arms of Albergaria, © HERCULES; LJF-DGPC, 2013

Fig. 17. Reproduction of Albergaria's portrait by Resende, c. 1635. © British Library

Expected Outcome

The Old Goa Revelations project aims to develop and implement a transdisciplinary methodology that crosses and integrates several areas of knowledge (history, museology, conservation, physical and biological sciences) that can be applied to the study of this gallery, following the methodology developed in MNAA. The re-interpretation of this collection will be essential to provide information regarding conservation issues, as well as museographic tools which will help the public to have an improved visual and intellectual access to the collection. It can also establish, in a wider context, best-practices for interpretation, preservation and conservation of Portuguese origin heritage in India and worldwide. This project requires sensitivity towards the local laws and customs regarding the Portuguese presence. The aim is to foster good practices and friendly relations around the safeguarding of transcultural heritage and its correct interpretation.