

“Dressed in white” – Temporary exhibition devoted to the first Statue of Our Lady opens today

The exhibition reunites the most beautiful statues of the Virgin Mary and will allow to see up close the first sculpture of Our Lady of Fatima during an afternoon in 2020.

The new temporary exhibition at the Shrine, “Dressed in White”, opens today, at 2:30 pm, in the beginning of the new pastoral year. In the year we are celebrating the centenary of the creation of the first sculpture of Our Lady of Fatima, this exhibition reunites the most beautiful statues of the Virgin Mary, in a reflection on the relation between art and devotion. This exhibition will be held at St. Augustine Social Hall, at the lower floor of the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, between 9:00 am and 6:00 pm daily, and runs until 15 October 2020.

The title of the new exhibition has its origin in the description of Our Lady made by Lúcia de Jesus to Fr. Manuel Nunes Formigão and Fr. Manuel Marques dos Santos, on July 8 1924, in which the seer, answering the question about “how was the Lady dressed”, says “She was dressed in white”. This interrogation, as well as the idea of a world-scale icon that the first sculpture of Our Lady of Fatima would become, open the preamble of the exhibition, as well as the other seven sections that constitute it.

In the first section, eight sculptures of Our Lady, carved in Portugal and ranging from the 16th century to the present-day, provide a synthesis of the Virgin Mary’s

representations during that period of time. In this displaying section the female beauty canons established by the artists in each representation of the Virgin Mary are emphasized.

In the following section, the story of the image of the Mother of God is shown through the representation in artworks of the most significant spaces and places of Her life, since Her birth to Her death and Glory, in Heaven. The Cross of Christ becomes the central interpretative code of this story.

The plasticity of topicality is focused on the third section, in which several significant contemporary artists were challenged to interpret, from their personal aesthetics, the symbols of the Virgin Mother.

“The shapes and colours of new iconographies” from the fourth section highlight the aesthetical innovation by which Mary was perceived over the years, through sculptures of Our Lady by artists such as Clara Menéres and António Manuel Soares dos Reis. This section also includes artworks that were not accepted by the faithful because of their aesthetic options, expressing the tension between creation and reception of the sacred artwork.

From the fifth section, the exhibition centres on the Statue of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, presenting a journey which begins in its iconographic creation, passing through the commission and settling of the model, its diffusion all over the world and its interpretation by the artists. This section exhibits the first prayer card which circulated among the crowd in Cova da Iria, on October 13 1917, in which the Apparition is represented by a photo of the Statue of Our Lady of the Conception, from the See of Leiria, which is also exhibited there.

In the fifth section there is a glass case exhibiting a real-size picture of the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima that is worshipped at the Little Chapel of the Apparitions. On this site, in July 13 2020, during the afternoon, the day the Statue will arrive at the Shrine, visitors shall have the opportunity to admire up close the sculpture that constitutes one of the most significant contemporary Marian icons of Catholicism.

The next section presents, through different representations of the Virgin Mary, the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima as the paradigm of the discussion about the dialogue between ancient art and contemporary art.

In the conclusion, the myths, challenges and heritage of the Statue are revealed. The conservation practices for the sculpture are shown here, and it is demonstrated that the strength of the sculpture created in 1920 lies mainly in the effectiveness of making images happen that are interesting for the world, among which are the nuptial image, royalty, motherly protection and peace.

In the last but one display of the exhibition, before a maquette of the sculpture of Our Lady of the Shepherds, the visitor is invited to experiment sensorially Pope Francis’ statement made in the homily at Cova da Iria on May 13 2017 that Fatima is a “mantle of Light”, through the projection of the face in the mantle of the maquette.

With this new exhibition, the Shrine of Fatima assumes the culture language of museums and the path of beauty as one of the ways of conveying contents from the message of Fatima and its history.

Admission to the exhibition is free.



On the first Statue of Our Lady of Fatima

The sculpture of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima worshipped at the Little Chapel of the Apparitions was commissioned in 1919 by a devotee from Torres Novas, Gilberto Fernandes dos Santos, to Casa Fânzeres, in Braga, fulfilling the pilgrims' desire to have, aside from the Little Chapel, a statue that they could identify as being the "Lady surrounded by light" who appeared to the three Little Shepherds in 1917.

Sculpted by the saint maker José Ferreira Thedim, inspired by a statue of Our Lady of Lapa, worshipped in Ponte de Lima, the Statue was "modelled and carved according to the account of the seers", just as it was transmitted by Canon Manuel Formigão. Therefore the artist had no direct access to the testimony of Lúcia, Francisco and Jacinta.

The statue is 1,04 meters high and is made of Brazilian cedar. Casa Teixeira Fânzeres, from Braga, applied the polychromy and gilt.

The Statue was consecrated on May 13 1920 by the priest of Fatima, Fr. Manuel Marques Ferreira, at the Parish Church, having been taken to the Little Chapel of the Apparitions in June 13 that same year.

Every night the Statue was taken away by the keeper Maria Carreira – known as Maria of the Little Chapel – and for this reason it escaped safe and sound to the bomb attack

of March 6 1922, which partially destroyed the Little Chapel.

The Statue that had been solemnly crowned by the Pontifical Legate Cardinal Aloisi Masella on May 13 1946 was restored by its author in 1951, and since then it has been retouched several times.

From May 1982, with the renovation of the Little Chapel of the Apparitions in time for the first visit of John Paul II, the Statue stands outside the Little Chapel in a plinth, in the exact spot of the original holm-oak (gone by now, due to the action of the faithful) above which Our Lady appeared to the three Little Shepherds.

Protected by a bullet-proof glass case, the Statue used to be taken to the inside of the Little Chapel, at the end of the day, a few minutes before midnight, for security reasons, returning to the same place the following morning.

It has been like this until 2009, when the Shrine of Fatima began broadcasting on the Internet images of the Little Chapel, 24 hours a day, captured by a camera focused in the Statue. From that time on, the sculpture representing Our Lady of Fatima can always be seen by everyone, not only at Cova da Iria, but also everywhere in the world through the Internet.

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