For nearly 200 years, the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis has endeavoured to reinvent itself, to forge new paths, to re-read its collections and see its narratives in a new light, enhancing the cultural heritage under its protection and honouring the history of its legacy.

Created by King Pedro IV in 1833, in the midst of the Liberal Revolution, the MNSR is the first public art museum in Portugal. Starting life as the Museu de Pinturas e Estampas (Museum of Paintings and Prints) was formalised by Queen Maria II in 1836.

The museum was founded within an international context where culture was regarded as being of value and something to be shared with the people, a trend initiated by the French Revolution in 1789. Within this context, we can list the creation of the Louvre (Paris), in 1793, and the Prado (Madrid) in 1819, the latter thanks to the efforts of the Portuguese princess Maria Isabel de Bragança, Pedro IV's sister.

Over the course of these 190 years, the collection has become more structured and new cultural practices have become established, particularly in terms of increasing knowledge about the artists and collections, allowing for the organisation of publications, temporary exhibitions and the creation of the education service. It is worth highlighting the publication of the Museu magazine by the Círculo Dr. José de Figueiredo, the oldest association of friends of museums in the country.

In this long-term exhibition, we propose a journey that can be read along two complementary lines:
- The history of the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, organised according to the formation of its collections;
- The artistic movements of which the artists and their works were part.

Museums and exhibitions reflect their contexts and the noteworthy events they have witnessed over the course of their existence. The history of the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis can be traced alongside the political and social history of Portugal. This is a Museum that has reinvented itself and overcome barriers throughout its existence, and which today seeks to respond to the challenges of the contemporary world.

What do we hope for? We hope to bring the history of the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis to the fore and become a respected cultural and artistic institution with a collection reflecting an international dimension. An essential place for knowledge, a special place for leisure, of discovery, of discussion, a place for people... come in, visit, see, observe, enjoy and.... come back again!

António Ponte
MNSR Director
April 2023

Information

Museum hours
Tuesday to Sunday:
10:00–18:00 (last entry at 17:30)

Closed
January 1st, Easter Sunday, May 1st,
June 24th, and December 25th

Entry with suitcases, umbrellas, or other large items is not allowed. The MNSR provides lockers free of charge for this purpose.

Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis

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REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA CULTURA
MUSEUS E MONUMENTOS DE PORTUGAL
Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis
amigos do museu nacional de soares dos reis círculo dr. josé figueiredo

Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis



1833–2023

Visitor guide

A Museum of people, by people, for people

1st floor

1.1

The founding of the Museum

The Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis started life as the *Museu de Pinturas e Estampas e outros objetos de Belas Artes* (Museum of Paintings and Prints and other Fine Arts objects), created by King Pedro IV of Portugal, the first Emperor of Brazil. Known as the Museu Portuense (Porto Museum), it was housed in the former Convent of Santo António da Cidade, on Praça de São Lázaro.

During the Liberal Wars (1832–34), Pedro IV instructed the painter João Batista Ribeiro to gather artworks from the supporters of his adversary Dom Miguel and from the abandoned convents of Porto — a group of works that became the basis of the Museum collection.



Portrait of King Pedro IV
John Simpson

The Museum and the former monasteries

The first section of the Museum collection is largely composed of paintings and prints that were removed in 1833 from the abandoned monasteries, charitable homes and convents of Porto. The enactment of the decree for the dissolution of religious orders, in 1834, allowed the Museum to incorporate the artistic assets of the monasteries of São Martinho de Tibães and Santa Cruz de Coimbra.

This first public art museum in Portugal registed paintings, prints and historical objects, such as the series of enamels of the Passion of Christ from the Monastery of Santa Cruz de Coimbra.



Series of 26 plaques with scenes of the Cycle of the Passion for Christ

1.2 1.3 1.4 1.5 1.6 1.7

The Museum and the Academia Portuense de Belas Artes

The founding of the Museu Portuense was formalised in 1836 by decree of Queen Maria II and was followed by the creation of the Academia Portuense de Belas Artes (Porto Academy of Fine Arts), as part of a series of reforms in public education. This teaching of the arts had begun with the Drawing Course at the Academia Real de Marinha e Comércio (Royal Academy of Navy and Commerce), directed by Vieira Portuense.

In 1839, the Museum came under the management of the Academy and remained that way until the proclamation of the Republic in 1910. The initial collections were enhanced by academic works sent by students studying abroad on scholarships aimed at supporting the teaching methods. The exhibitions held between 1870 and 1890 relate to a prosperous period in the history of the Academia Portuense de Belas Artes.



The Escape of Margaret of Anjou
Francisco Vieira (o Portuense)

1.8 1.9

The Patron of the Museum – Soares dos Reis

In the reforms implemented by the new Republic in 1911, museums were regarded as an important means of social intervention, aimed at educating the aesthetic sensibilities of the country's citizens. With this in mind, large museums were founded in Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto.

The Museu Portuense came to be called Museu Soares dos Reis in tribute to one of the most renowned names in Portuguese art — the sculptor António Soares dos Reis. In 1940, the Museum's patron came to occupy a prominent place in this gallery in Carrancas Palace.



The Exiled
António Soares dos Reis

1.8 1.9 1.10 1.11 1.12

National Museum status

In 1932, the Museum was elevated to the category of National Museum, becoming independent from Porto's Fine Arts School. This newly found autonomy led to the growth of the collections of painting and sculpture sourced from other centres of artistic creation, as is the case with artists from Lisbon.



Self-portrait
Aurélia de Souza

1.13 1.14

The Museum's encounter with Modernism

Between 1950 and 1960, under the direction of the sculptor and teacher Salvador Barata Feyo, the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis invested in updating its painting and sculpture collections.
It focused in particular on the purchase of works by contemporary artists, most of whom had studied at the Escola de Belas Artes do Porto. More than 150 works were acquired through the João Chagas Fund (created by Maria Teresa Chagas, widow of the politician, diplomat and journalist). Thanks to this initiative, almost all of the most renowned names of Portuguese Modernism are currently represented in the collection.



Barcelos pottery
Eduardo Viana

1.15 1.16

The Contemporary Art Centre (CAC)

Until the mid-1970s, the city of Porto, somewhat distanced from the official culture of the dictatorial regime, developed a degree of autonomy. The emergence of independent and alternative spaces with innovative programmes contributed to a fertile artistic dynamic.

After the transition to democracy, the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) appeared in 1975, directed by the art critic and teacher Fernando Pernes. Associated with the Museum and housed within it, a programme of exhibitions and events was launched, with occasionally controversial themes, such as eroticism in art or torture.

During the CAC's six years of activity, nearly a hundred works were acquired, which formed the basis for a public collection of contemporary art.

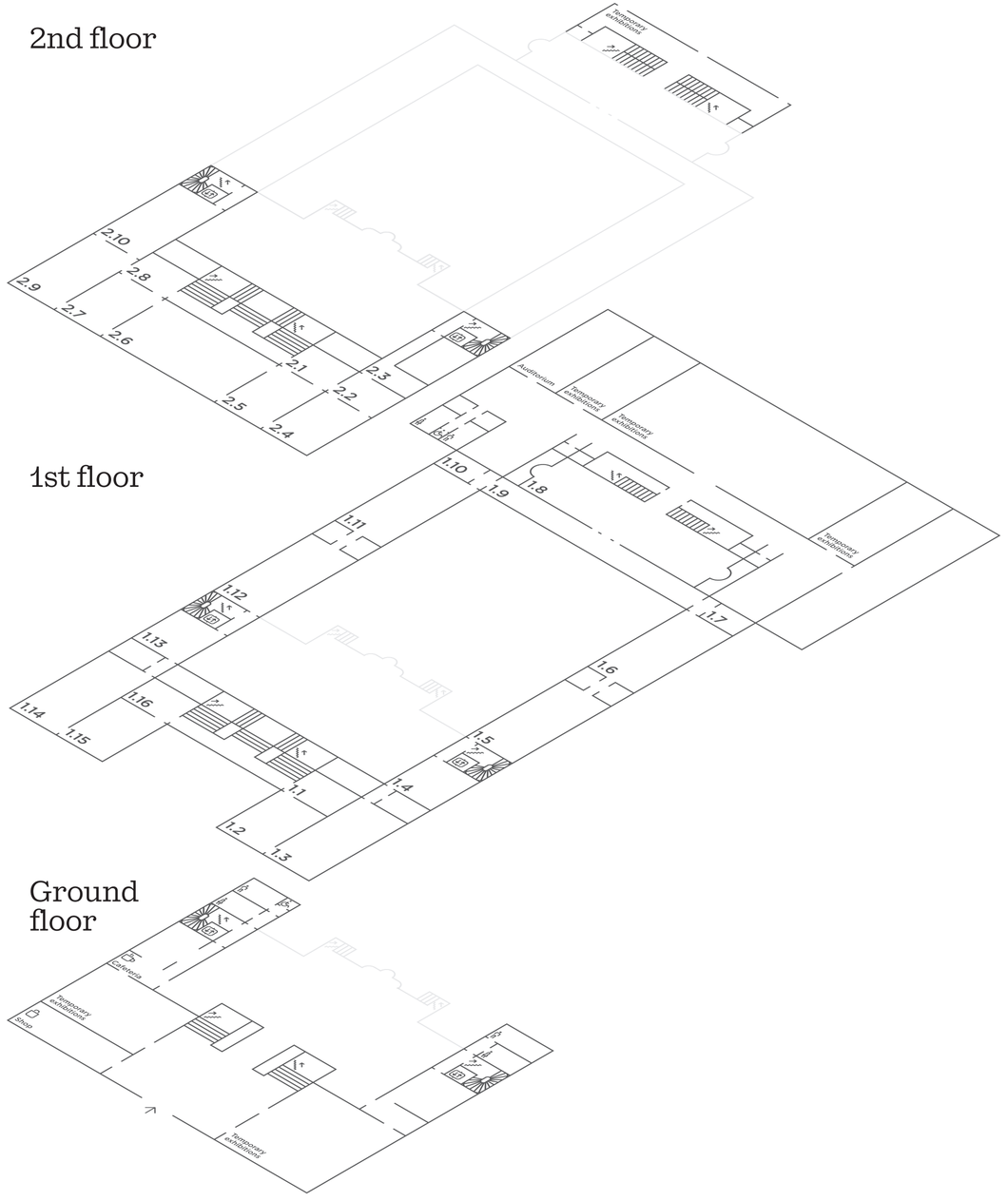


Untitled
Armando Alves

2nd floor

1st floor

Ground floor



2nd floor

2.1 2.2 2.3

The Museum in Carrancas Palace and the diversification of the collections

In 1932, the Museum was given the status of National Museum and was significantly enhanced thanks to the actions of its then director, Vasco Valente.

The collections of the Museu Nacional and the former Museu Municipal do Porto were combined and housed here in Carrancas Palace, duly adapted for its new museological functions of conservation and exhibition.

The building had been the home and factory of the Morais e Castro family until 1862, when it was acquired by the royal family and used as the Royal Palace in Porto until 1910.

On the second and main floor some of the original neo-classical interiors are still intact. The display of Decorative and Fine Arts, both national and international, reflect the evolution and diversity of the Museum's collections.



Reliquary Bust of St Pantaleon

2.4

The Music Room in Carracas Palace

The former music room in Carrancas Palace still has its original decoration of furniture, stuccoes and painting. In a neo-classical style, in keeping with the building's architecture, it is inspired by Antiquity and the principles of sobriety and harmony. On the ceiling, an *Allegory to Music* attributed to the painter Vieira Portuense evokes the function of this room on the main floor of the palace, recalling the opulent lifestyle of the Morais e Castro family.

As the Royal Palace (1862–1910), this room was used as the monarchs' private chambers. In 1937, the building was acquired by the State to house the Museum. Most of the chambers of this floor lost their decoration, except this room and the dining room.



Pier-glass and console tables
Luigi Chiari

2.5

The deposit of Porto City Council's collections

In 1940, the Art and Archaeology collections belonging to Porto City Council came to the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis. The safeguarding of this heritage contributed to a reconfiguration of the Museum, which since then has been strongly marked by the presence of Decorative Arts.

The Museu Municipal do Porto, where these works had previously been held, was organised around the collection of João Allen and works from other provenances, in 1850.



Dog Joss-stick Holder (pair)

2.6 2.7 2.8

The diversification of the collections

Throughout its history, the Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis has brought together collections from diverse provenances and different periods and places of production.

This diversity stems from the European tendency to consider Heritage in a multidisciplinary way, seeing the relationships between Painting and Sculpture and the Decorative Arts, particularly Silverwork, Furniture and Ceramics.



Crucified Christ
Valladolid or Palencia workshop

2.9 2.10

New themes – the East

During the 1950s, the acquisition and exhibition of a pair of Namban screens provided an opportunity to approach to the subject of relationships between Portugal and the East: India, China and Japan.

The screens were associated with other luxury objects produced in the East between the 16th and 18th centuries. The arrival in Europe of exotic and precious merchandise reflects the European fascination with millennia-old oriental arts and techniques, using stone, wood and precious metals, marble, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, silk, lacquer and porcelain.

The Museum opened to new outlooks on its collections, seeking dialogue between cultures.



Namban Screens (pair)