



# Portugal

*Drawing the world*

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## Foreword by the director of the MNAA

In Lisbon, in *Rua das Janelas Verdes*, the street along which the building of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (MNAA) stretches, the Luxembourg Embassy is almost “next door”, located in an old neighbourhood of the capital city where many of the diplomatic representations of foreign countries are to be found. None of them, however, is situated quite so physically close as this embassy to the institution housing the most substantial part of the artistic treasures that tell the history of an ancient country now almost nine centuries old.

Similarly, in the Grand Duchy, where the Musée national d’histoire et d’art can, by its very nature, be considered the symmetrical counterpart of the MNAA, no other national community is so extensively implanted as the Portuguese one, or enjoys such a close and high-quality relationship with a country that today represents an important case study due to its exemplary capacity for absorbing others without losing its own identity. Certainly contributing towards this is the special temperament of the Portuguese, who are a naturally reserved people inclined towards harmonious integration with the way of being of each community, but, at the same time, we must also consider the influence of the Luxembourgers, steeped in the avatars of their own tenacious history, who are just as averse to any form of particularly strident manifestations as they are inclined towards displaying their natural hospitality.

In such a context, it is of great importance for both countries to deepen their mutual knowledge of one another – and for the institutions to fulfil their special missions by promoting it. Naturally, the already-mentioned physical proximity between the Museum and the Embassy in an old Lisbon street played its own important role, by firstly encouraging a working relationship between the

two institutions and then gradually developing this into a relationship of friendship. This has been achieved successively with the former ambassador of Luxembourg and the great friend of Portugal, His Excellency Paul Schmit; with my colleague and good friend Michel Polfer, the remarkable director of the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art; and with the new and dynamic ambassador of Portugal in Luxembourg, His Excellency Carlos Pereira Marques, who is also a personal friend of mine. It was the mutual cooperation of them all that, from 2015 onwards, laid the foundations for this ambitious and complex project resulting in the exhibition *Portugal – Drawing the World*. At the same time, it is also very important to underline how the competence and dedication of both teams made this event possible.

Because of their efforts, Portugal (and the MNAA) will present themselves in Luxembourg, on its highest stage, just as was the case almost thirty years ago with the remarkable exhibition *Le Langage des orfèvres de Portugal – A Linguagem dos nossos Ourives* (The Language of the Portuguese Goldsmiths). However, it was not just the planning for the present exhibition that was initiated in 2015: to mark the beginning of this work, both museums embarked on a prestigious exchange of masterpieces, which is still taking place at this very moment with the Villa Vauban Museum, and which will certainly be continued in the future with these or other institutions from the two countries. Since then, in fact, in the intense working relationship that has been set up between institutions and their professional staff, Portugal and Luxembourg have gained the perception of their being, mutually, “next door” to one another.

It has thus been possible, within just a few years, to develop intense relations at the cultural level, leading to a new

phase in the mutual perception of the appreciable heritage that the two countries have to display and making a powerful contribution to deepening the esteem and consideration felt in both countries and reflected in all areas of their common activity. In the present day and age, Drawing the World means precisely what it says: building, among everyone, a better world in which we all can live. And, in this field, both countries certainly have some important histories to tell.

**António Filipe Pimentel**

*Director of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga*