

**CONCELLO
DE VIGO**



GREETING FROM THE CITY HALL

From **Concello de Vigo (city hall of Vigo)** we wish you a Merry Christmas with our best wishes for these dates and with the hope that the year 2022 will serve to fulfil your resolutions.

This artistic nativity scene of careful scenography, elaborated by the Agrupación La Morana, is populated by two hundred figures made between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, occupying more than one hundred square metres.

The recreation of the first Christmas in the Casa das Artes offers us the possibility of travelling two thousand years back in time to reach Bethlehem through the star, the shepherds, the kings, the angels or the stable. In this miniature world of cork, sawdust and moss, the city's heritage has its own space with the representation of the Lagares and Eifonso rivers, the Matamá petroglyphs, the Roman Villa of Toralla, the Roman salt mines of Arenal, the Alcabre saltworks, the Roman bridge of Castrelos, the Olive Tree or the Berbés market.

IMOS A BELÉN is an invitation to get to know the traditional representation of the Nativity of Jesus and to approach a part of Vigo's history, where Christmas is lived today with all its intensity.





First part / Elements of the traditional nativity

The star

The Christians got the idea of making arise a star that announces and points to Jesus' birth from the ancient traditions. One or several stars, because, on one hand we know the star that announces the Birth to the Wisemen and guides its way meanwhile on the other hand it remained as a light and sign on the Stable. One and another area different. The three Wise Men star is a comet through the space that determines the destiny and the star at the Stable is light of five points, the Christmas star, which has got lots of suggestions to ancient mythological symbolisms.

Nowadays, many astronomers agree on the fact that around the year of Jesus' Birth an astronomic event took place, something that could highlight the stellar reference of the Nativity scenes.

The stable

The gospels find the crib where Jesus was born in an underground room or cave where the shepherds kept the cattle on the outskirts of Bethlehem, but different popular traditions have embellished this fact placing the characters in a stable or ruins which are the symbol of Christianity birth over the pagan rites.

Bethlehem Stable is a protagonist itself in many popular carols all over the world as a sacred place where the crib was situated. Its vestiges were found by the Empress Helen, and they are adored in the Basilica Santa María la Mayor, in Rome.

The bridge

The bridge is a universal symbol of transit, a passageway rite, of searching, of connection. A river carries us from a bank to another, maybe, from the known to the unknown...however, something that is undeniable is that we universally accept that crossing bridges is a help for saving obstacles or difficulties in life.

The bridge is a power and union symbol. This symbology is very old. The title that the roman emperors received, and Popes have inherited is Pontifex Maximus in which the word Pontifex means "bridge builder".



The river

Water was one of the four elements that formed the cosmic reality together with the air, earth, and fire as the ancients believed. Water is a main part and a vital foundation in all the cultures and religions, and it is considered as a vital generating principle that constitutes everything.

The main cities and villages were built on a riverside for ensuring the citizens plenty of water and crops irrigation.

The presence of a waterflow in the Nativity scenes symbolises the prosperity and fertility that arises from Jesus' Birth message, who gives us the necessary force for overcoming the evil as a living waterflow.

The well

Wells and fountains presence in Nativity scenes is not a casual thing. Mankind forgot the fountain of Eden, the source of living water that not only feeds us but also participates in our peace and prosperity. Christ arrival to the Earth renews God's promise with men. It is like finding a water source in the middle of the desert.

When we are given baptism, water is sprayed on our head, man's renewal is represented, and the sin is rejected. According to the New Testament, living water represents God's spirit and therefore everlasting life.

The castle

The earthly human, politic and social power is represented by King Herod's fortress, Judea's governor during Rome occupation in the first century. His plans of finding and killing Jesus were mocked with the hasty departure of the Wise Men and the escape to Egypt of the Holy family. The castle and its architectural power can do nothing before God's plans as the strength of its walls reflects its endless force.



The village

The traditional nativity scene a hamlet or village in the distant horizon never lacks. It is usually identified with Bethlehem of Jud, which is the most popular city around the world for living Christmas because, according to the Bible it was the city where Jesus of Nazareth was born. Prophecy was fulfilled as it is the place of birth and crowning of King David.

But we can also relate it with the New Jerusalem, representations a city either literal or figurative that shows a physical reconstruction or a spiritual restoration. Jesus' Birth announces the new kingdom of God where a new Jerusalem will be restored among gentile nations, that is why it is sometimes represented as a walled town with different palaces and towers.

The mill

The endlessly spinning blades tell us that the passage of time does not alter the message of joy and peace that the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem brings to humanity. In some cultures, the spinning of the stars around the north celestial pole is depicted as a large windmill, but for Christians the flour that is ground in the mill and then kneaded into bread, is a symbol of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The road

All roads converge in the grotto of Bethlehem evoking in a simple and plastic way what is the true centre of the Christmas celebration. All the characters go to visit the new-born with their offerings. In some countries the custom of advancing the figures day by day until they reach the crib is maintained. The Advent that precedes Christmas is a journey, an intimate process in which everyone finds their own answers and their own way of carrying them out in the journey of life.

EXHIBITION PLATFORM

Joseph and Mary travelled over five days on stony roads from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Joseph's home village where they had to register in the census as ordered by Octavian Augustus in Judea.

In those days, a lot of travellers who had not found any place to stay in Jerusalem, opted to stay in the nearby village of Bethlehem. Therefore, Joseph and Mary did not find any availability in the inns and at nightfall they had to take shelter in a stable that was carved into the rock. There, Jesus was born.

The Gospel tells us that that same night an angel appeared to the shepherds in the cliffs of Bethlehem, announcing the birth of the awaited Messiah. The surprised shepherds ran to the stable to meet Jesus.

A new constellation appeared in the sky. Some wise men from the East who were guided by a shooting star, arrived as a parade with their dromedaries in order to deliver their presents to Jesus. Gold as a king, incense as God and myrrh as a Man.

Second part/ Traditional nativity scene characters

The Mystery

The Virgin is usually depicted with her hair half-hidden by a veil because she is neither married nor a maiden. The earliest depictions show Mary lying down after childbirth, but to emphasize her virginal status, she began to be depicted kneeling or sitting. Representing St. Joseph as an old man reinforced the idea that he did not beget Jesus, even distancing him from the Child and the Virgin. Saint Teresa reclaims her role and her presence in the Nativity Scene is ennobled by being an indissoluble part of the Holy Family. The rod that St. Joseph carries is the biblical rod of the patriarchs, inherited from the rod of the pharaohs and flourished as a divine sign when Mary's suitors were disputing for her hand.

Mary wears a pink tunic in allusion to the Incarnation of God as Man in her womb and a blue mantle as Queen of Heaven, while Joseph usually wears purple like the Nazarenes and a yellow mantle; a colour that identified the Hebrews as a merchant guild during the Middle Ages. Sometimes he also wears a brown garment as a reminder of his trade as a carpenter.

The ox represents the ancient pagan cults and the mule the Hebrew people. Both animals, unable to reproduce and therefore to perpetuate themselves, recognize the Messiah by prostrating themselves before him and acknowledging his presence in the manger, the humblest place in the house.



The angels

They are the heralds bearing the message of the Good News, heralds of events and dangers, and revellers of the divine will that traces the beginning of the Redemption of Humanity. The angels warn Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men, by their visit or in dreams, of God's plans. Their presence in Nativity scene as intermediaries between God and mankind is a sign of commitment and faithfulness.

The presence of angels is again linked to ancient mythology. In classical Greece and Rome, winged beings are always messengers of news.

The angels are the first worshippers of the new-born Child, and in some Nativity scenes we see them singing hymns and playing instruments around the grotto of the Nativity. It is a reminder of the scenic traditions that were celebrated around the festivities in the temples, where music always played a fundamental role. The children's custom of singing in front of the crib keeps alive today that angelic heritage that ensures that the Child does not wake up, that he does not come out of his peaceful sleep.

The Wise Men

According to the Gospel of Matthew, "wise men from the East came to Jerusalem" to worship Jesus. From the 3rd century onwards, their number was set at three characters who became known as kings, as magic was persecuted by the Church. It was in the 15th century that the European, Eastern and African races began to be represented in the three states of life (old, mature, and young). Epiphany is the manifestation of the coming of the Messiah to all the people of the world.

The shepherds

The shepherds are the first men to learn of the birth of Jesus and their presence in Nativity scene symbolises the manifestation of the coming of the Messiah to the chosen people. Their humble and marginalised condition makes them worthy of such an honour to emphasise that Redemption comes to all regardless of class or condition.

In the representation of the Nativity scenes, the shepherds allow the presence of local customs and ways of life and originally there were only three of them, named José, Isacio and Jacobo, whose remains, according to tradition, are kept in the parish of Ledesma in Salamanca.

Regarding their function, primitive traditions also assigned them a role: one brought food, the other overcoat, and the last one, music, played with a bagpipe. Therefore, the shepherd musician par excellence in Spanish Nativity scenes is the bagpiper.

Alongside the shepherds, the presence of the flocks of sheep reinforces the idea of the people of God welcoming the Good News.

THIRD PART/ LOCAL SCENES

On the occasion of the Christmas exhibition IMOS A BELÉN, the City Council of Vigo and the Agrupación Belenista La Morana have wanted to relate some elements of the scenography with outstanding examples of local heritage to give an even more didactic sense to the observation of the scenes. Their location and description also contextualize the historical moment represented, enrich the visit and take us to different periods easily recognizable in the surroundings of the Concello.

LAGARES RIVER

The Lagares river is the main waterflow in the city of Vigo. Its source is in the Mol lagoon between the place of La Retorta in the parish of Cabral (Vigo), within the facilities of the Real Aero Club, forming its source a small pond from which its course begins. It stretches across the entire southern part of the municipality, from east to west, from the parishes of Candeán, Cabral and Castrelos to its mouth in the Vigo estuary at the southern end of the populous Samil beach, where it forms a large area of marshland.

EIFONSO RIVER

It is a tributary of the river Lagares, on its left bank at the height of Sárdoma, whose last seven kilometres are covered by a park-walk of 40,000 square metres that extends from the industrial area of the Madrid Avenue to the marshes in the area of A Carrasqueira, in the parish of Coruxo. In the past, these banks were lined with various mills that used the power of the water to grind wheat. The river Barxa also flows into the Lagares in the Castrelos area.

MUÍÑO DAS MAQUÍAS HOUSE IN ZAMANS

On the banks of the river Zamáns, and near the spillway of the reservoir of the same name, this mill house stands, it is invaded by nature, but in an apparently good state of conservation. Its name Maquías (Maquila in plural), refers to the part that the miller keeps as payment for his work, which is equivalent to approximately 5% of the cereal.

The impressive natural and plant framework in which it is framed, together with the formidable structure of the mill, make it one of the most spectacular examples in Galicia. Where the reservoir begins there is also a set of reconstructed water mills that were moved by the water of the Vilaza River and which form part of the Zamáns route.



PETROGLYPH OF MATAMÁ

This Vigo petroglyph is located in the da Moo neighbourhood, in the parish of Matamá, and is one of the most emblematic and representative of our rock art repertoire, as it is the only representation of a deer in our municipality.

You have to go to the Baixada da Moo Road, next to the second ring road around Vigo, on the hill behind the only house next to the bridge that crosses the motorway, you will find an interesting group of several rocks richly engraved with various rock motifs.

ROMAN VILLAGE OF TORALLA

This Roman villa is located by the sea, in the "Finca Mirambell", in front of the island of Toralla, at the entrance of the bridge, between the beaches of O Vao and Canido. The villa dates from the 4th century AD, in the late Roman period, near the end of the empire. This was a period in which numerous Roman villas proliferated throughout our territory, of which we have several examples in the municipality of Vigo: O Cocho and O Fiunchal in Alcabre, Ríos in Teis, and Sobreira in Oia.

In this case we should also highlight the proximity to the Galician hill fort of Toralla Island, located a few metres away, although the hill fort seems to have ceased to be inhabited before the construction of the Roman villa. The Roman villa was no longer inhabited in the mid-5th century AD.

MILL OF SOLOEIDO DE ABAIXO IN ZAMÁNS

This is the fifth mill that closes the restored ethnographic complex of Zamáns. It is located in the hollow of a meadow, next to the four previous mills, where the river Vilaza flows shortly before emptying its waters into the Zamáns reservoir. Following the downstream course of the river, the five mills form an ethnographic ensemble of special beauty, both for the environment in which they are located and for the beautiful restoration to which they were subjected.

The water flow is well preserved and comes directly from the fourth mill of this group; in fact, the water flows from one mill to the other along the entire route. In these last metres, it rises the slope of the land, reinforced by solid lateral stonework supports topped by solid perpiaños in the area of the bucket.

AXES FROM ZAMÁNS

The oldest bronze axes that we have dated in Vigo correspond to the so-called flat axes and belong to the Early Bronze Age, which we can date to around 1,500 to 1,000 B.C. These are two examples that were found by chance, and we do not have specific details of the circumstances of their manufacture and use.

ROMAN SALT MINES IN O AREAL

Although the first archaeological references date back to the 19th century, the first major discovery was made in the 1950s, when 29 funerary stelae and 1 Roman altar were discovered by chance during the construction of a house in 1953. In the 1990s, during the urban development works in the city, various archaeological interventions were carried out which allowed all the previous evidence to be confirmed and confirmed the existence of settlements and necropolis from Roman and medieval times and an Atlantic salt mine by solar evaporation with a surface area of more than 10,000 square metres.

The structure of the O Areal salt mine is defined by the alignments of driven stones and the clay and flagstone pavements between them, which together form the basins or enclosures in which the salt was decanted by solar evaporation of the seawater.

CASTRELOS ROMAN BRIDGE

It is located in Castrelos in the crossing of the Roman Bridge, between the streets of Balaídos, Castrelos Avenue and Alcalde Portanet Avenue. In a low area of the Fragoso Valley known as Balaídos, very close to the stadium of the same name and the Castrelos Park.

It is one of the two old bridges still standing that cross the river Lagares, the other is in Sárdoma, which gave access to the Pazo de la Caracola, and is still used for pedestrian traffic.

Its origins are uncertain, although it is possible that it has a Roman origin, as this area was highly Romanized, with numerous salting factories, salt works, villas and a great deal of commercial activity around the Roman-Castre settlement known as Vicus.

THE OLIVE TREE, EMBLEM OF VIGO

During the Middle Ages, Vigo was known for its olive plantations and for its flourishing fishing trade, being known by the nickname of "Olive City", and nowadays "Olive City" due to the fact that in the atrium of the church of the Collegiate Church of Santa María there was a large olive tree that was planted by the Knights Templar monks and disappeared when the current church was built.

When the olive tree was felled, Mr Manuel Ángel Pereira, administrator of the Customs House, took one of its branches and planted it in the garden of his house, in front of the Puerta del Sol. There it took root and grew until the development of the city made it disappear, but not before being planted again in the Paseo de Alfonso XII where it can be seen today, so that the vigorous lineage of that symbolic tree of Vigo's tradition would not be lost. The olive tree forms part of the city's heraldic emblem.

THE BERBESE MARKET

In Vigo, known as "Vicus Spacorum", the Romanisation process took place at an early stage. Archaeological remains show the existence of intense port and commercial activity on the Vigo coast from the 2nd century BC until the 1st century AD, the century in which the Pax Romana was established. This suggests the existence of markets and fish markets from which products were distributed.

The O Berbés market is one of the oldest in Vigo and, in the 19th century, it was the only one where fish was bought in the city. Today it continues to stand out for its fish and seafood, but like so many markets in Spain, it is constantly reinventing itself to attract a new public.

ÁNFORAS DE OLIVEIRA

In the middle of the last century, when land was cleared at the site of Oliveira (Teis, Vigo), important Roman remains were found, such as engraved bricks (in the display case of construction elements), column drums and an oleic press (outside the museum) together with two bases and a mortar (in the hall), as well as other common materials, such as hand mills, tegulae and amphorae.

It is thought that it could be a villa or factory because of the oil press found, the only example found in Galicia. It was also suggested that there was a possible relationship between the production of oil and the cultivation of olive trees in Vigo in antiquity and the activity that would give the place its name. However, more remains of small oil lamps (lucernae) should appear in Vigo, a scarcity which, together with that of the oil amphorae, is interpreted as a lack of consumption of this product.



SÁRDOMA BRIDGE

The Sárdoma Bridge is a medieval bridge that crosses the Lagares River in the Vigo parish of Sárdoma near the pazo de la Caracola. It may have Roman origins, although the current bridge has been in use since at least the 12th century.

The bridge, made of granite masonry with regular stones, is simple, with a straight platform (it does not have the typical ascending and descending fascia of medieval bridges, such as the one in Castrelos), is 10 metres long, and spans the river thanks to two semicircular arches. It also has a central cutwater.

CASA DOS MOUROS DOLMEN

The dolmen at Casa dos Mouros is a megalithic monument located in Candeán, in the municipality of Vigo, very close to the training grounds of the Real Club Celta de Vigo and very close to the Madroa Zoological Park. Built between the end of the 5th millennium BC and the end of the 3rd millennium BC, these are Neolithic remains linked to the megalithic culture that developed in Galicia three or four millennia before the year 0. This dolmen is classified as one of the best preserved and largest. It is the largest megalithic monument in the area and is considered an Asset of Cultural Interest.

The dolmen is made up of five orthostats (vertical slabs) that form the walls of the monument and the roof, which is supported on one of the slabs.

SALTWORKS OF ALCABRE

At Punta Borralleiro in Alcabre, the rock was used as a base for the salt works. Archaeologists have found several walls, such as those found in Pontevedra Street in Vigo, where different levels of occupation have been found, from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD, although we do not know if the exploitation was continuous.

It is known that the site of the salt pans was used for a necropolis between the 3rd and 6th centuries. These salt pans would have covered an area of 400 m², where there were rectangular settling ponds bounded by stone slabs.



Fourth part / The workshops of Olot

IMOS A BELÉN brings together a select collection of imagery from the Olot school produced from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century, belonging to the Agrupació Belenista La Morana's own collection.

The Olot school of figurines was founded at the end of the 19th century under the protection of the drawing workshops of the flourishing Catalan textile industry, as an initiative of the brothers Joaquim and Marià Vayreda i Vila, who after visiting the Parisian district of Saint Sulpice opened an imagery workshop in 1880, following the academic style of French artists. The success in sales and the rapid popularity of the pieces led to the setting up of more than twenty workshops, which reached their zenith in the production of images during the Spanish post-Civil War period.

The sculptures of the saints of Olot are undoubtedly among the most impressive manifestations of sacred art of the 20th century, but they have never been fully appreciated because of the contempt of the cultural elite for mass-produced works of art.

However, with the revaluation of kitsch art from the 1960s onwards, the religious images of Olot became style icons with an undeniable aesthetic value that are highly prized on the antiquarian market.

The process of creating these saints has not changed much from its origins to the present day. It begins with the modelling of the original figure in clay, from which a plaster mould is made and a wooden structure divided into two parts that fit together perfectly, covered on the inside with a layer of gelatine so that the cardboard and wood mass from which the figure is made does not stick to the mould.

Each part of the mould is then covered with paste, sealed, and left to dry. When the mould has dried, it is opened, the figure is taken out and the gelatine is removed, the surfaces are polished, the details and parts of the figure that were not in the mould are added, and the glass eyes are placed in their sockets, for which it is necessary to saw off the top of the head, which will be replaced later. Finally, the figure is painted according to the category chosen by the customer. Before being painted, however, they are impregnated with a light coat of glue to cover any pores that may have been left in the paste.

At this point, the pieces take on their retail value. This is where they are painted and decorated. The price is directly related to the size and decoration of the piece. Pieces from workshops that are no longer in existence or out of print are highly prized by collectors

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END OF THE EXHIBITION

For centuries, the Nativity Scene has been one of the most popular attractive iconographic elements in the Christian tradition and its presence continues to be important during the celebration of Christmas, both in places of worship and in public spaces and homes.

The description of the places and the group of characters that the biblical narratives depict around the Nativity of Jesus offers an immense field of representational possibilities that have been used both in art and in the craft tradition. This has generated the coexistence of materials, styles and techniques to occupy a cultural space that encompasses both the popular and artistic spheres.

IMOS A BELÉN is a universe full of beauty and attraction that offers in the Casa Das Artes a vision of all the aspects that make up the rich and varied world of the most traditional Nativity Scene; from the symbolic and magical aspects, to the grace and meaning of its popular figures. All of this, through an exhibition script in which pieces from the end of the 19th century stand out and which will be enjoyed by thousands of people during these festivities.

This initiative of the **Concello de Vigo** has benefited from the experience of the Agrupación Belenista La Morana, which works to preserve and disseminate this deep-rooted Christmas tradition.

We hope you have enjoyed this tour of Bethlehem and that you will continue to be amazed by Christmas in Vigo.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR

