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Joaquim Machado de Castro, Analytical Description of the Execution of the Equestrian Statue Erected in Lisbon to the Glory of His Most Faithful Majesty King Joseph I

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Joaquim Machado de Castro, Analytical Description of the Execution of the Equestrian Statue Erected in Lisbon to the Glory of His Most Faithful Majesty King Joseph I, coord. by Miguel Figueira de Faria, translation by Patricia Delayti Telles, Lisbon, Universidade Autónoma Publisher, 2025, 438 p. 23 ills. Available in open access at https://hdl.handle.net/11144/7230

The Analytical Description of the Execution of the Equestrian Statue, published by Joaquim Machado dVVe Castro in 1810, is a rare and highly significant document within both Portuguese and European artistic contexts. More than a technical report on the creation of a monument, the text functions as a manifesto that elevates sculpture to the status of a liberal art. By chronicling the design and execution of the equestrian statue of King Joseph I, Machado de Castro positions the sculptor as an intellectual and creative agent - on par with the engineers, architects, and scholars of his time.

Unveiled in 1775 in the newly built Praça do Comércio - an emblem of Lisbon's reconstruction after the 1755 earthquake - the statue became a symbol of Pombaline political renewal and royal authority. Faced with the task of portraying an absent monarch, Machado de Castro drew upon numismatic models and idealized sculptural conventions. His decision to depict the king with a feathered helmet and a proud, commanding posture atop a dynamic horse results in a visual allegory of control, power, and stability. The symbolic dimension of this gesture is thoroughly explored in the text, revealing an artist acutely aware of the civic and political resonance of public monuments.

From a technical perspective, the *Analytical Description* is remarkable for the precision with which it details the modeling, molding, and casting processes -particularly the unprecedented feat of casting the entire statue in a single copper pour, a first in Portuguese history. Machado de Castro does more than document these procedures: he reflects on proportion, optical perception, and the anatomy of both human and horse, illustrating a synthesis of artistic practice and scientific reasoning. This approach exemplifies the Enlightenment spirit underpinning the work, as the sculptor asserts that sculpture is a form of disciplined, rational knowledge rather than a purely mechanical craft. Through this publication, he presents himself as both theorist and teacher, advocating for the intellectual legitimacy of his art in a society that often marginalized visual artists.

More broadly, the work can be read as a defense of the sculptor's role within an artistic production system dominated by royal commissions, military engineers, and state bureaucracies. Machado de Castro's frustration is clear regarding the disproportionate recognition granted to the engineers responsible for the casting (notably Bartolomeu da Costa) in contrast to the sculptor who conceived the entire project. In this sense, the *Description* is also a political statement - a declaration of authorship in a context where technical execution was frequently dissociated from artistic creation.

The English translation of the *Analytical Description* was presented at the international conference *Machado de Castro: artist–writer*, held at the National Academy of Fine Arts. Organized by Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, the event brought together a distinguished panel of scholars, including Miguel Figueira de Faria (UAL/NOVA FCSH), Charlotte Chastel-Rousseau (Musée du Louvre), and Josiah Blackmore (Harvard University), among others. The translation, carried out by Patrícia Delayti Telles, offers a rigorous and accessible reading of Machado de Castro's complex technical and aesthetic discourse, while carefully preserving the linguistic and stylistic nuances of the original.

This translation represents a major milestone. It allows Machado de Castro's treatise to engage with other major 18th-century European artistic texts - such as those by Jacques Saly, Étienne-Maurice Falconet, or Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy - and positions Portuguese sculptural theory within a broader, comparative framework. It also facilitates the international circulation of a text that, until recently, remained largely inaccessible outside Lusophone academic circles.

The international dissemination of the *Analytical Description* carries a dual significance. On one hand, it contributes to the reevaluation of 18th-century Portuguese sculpture, long marginalized in European art historiography. On the other, it reveals the originality of an authorial discourse that seamlessly integrates practice, theory, and pedagogy. Unlike many contemporary treatises - often written by critics or theorists - this one emerges directly from the hand of the artist himself: someone who fully experienced the creative process and reflected on it with the authority of both technical mastery and intellectual insight.

In short, Joaquim Machado de Castro's *Analytical Description* remains a foundational text — not only as a historical document but as a cornerstone for the theory of modern sculpture in Portugal. Its recent translation and international reception have brought renewed attention to this legacy, opening new avenues of research into the intersections between art, science, politics, and urban identity. The *Analytical Description* thus stands as a powerful testimony to the capacity of public art to generate critical discourse, and

to the sculptor as not merely a craftsman, but a thinker and interpreter of his own creative practice.