The Great Panorama of Lisbon is a tile panel attributed to the Spanish painter Gabriel del Barco, dating from around 1700. It depicts the city as it looked at that time, during the reign of King Peter II. Walking along its continuous, uninterrupted view, the long riverfront area flows alongside us, from what is today Algés to Xabregas. We are transported up the River Tagus in one of the many boats that is pictured, and then enter the city through its most beautiful and impressive gate, which has been so admired by travellers through the ages.

The Great Panorama of Lisbon (21st Century), one of the components of Joana Vasconcelos’s Trafaria Praia project, is also a tile panel depicting the city, but in a way it assumes just the opposite: that we have abandoned Lisbon and are standing on the banks of the Venice lagoon (or, in the future, some other course of water upon which the work finds itself). This piece is on the hull of a typical ferryboat from the River Tagus. In this “other” Lisbon we encounter on the journeys undertaken by this ship, the city skyline is altered, although there are many aspects that have remained the same, as they are unique and unchangeable. Vasconcelos’s work, which shows an up-to-date and much longer riverfront area, from the Bugio Tower to the Vasco da Gama Tower, thus embeds itself in a different way in the rich and trans-temporal artistic heritage generated by the city of Lisbon.

1 It is on display at the National Tile Museum in Lisbon, with inventory number #1, which demonstrates its importance in this institution’s holdings.
What stands out in both works, in the center of Lisbon, is the monumental and emblematic Terreiro do Paço, later named the Praça do Comércio and known as Black Horse Square in English. In the *Great Panorama of Lisbon (21st Century)*, the impressive Pombaline-style turrets, which were built during the reconstruction of the city's downtown area after the 1755 earthquake, elicit memories of the former turret of the Paço da Ribeira palace, pictured in the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*, which clearly stands out in the urban landscape due to its significant difference in scale in relation to the surrounding buildings. It was designed by the Italian architect Filippo Terzi during the reign of Philip I of Portugal (Philip II of Spain) and retained the military memory of an even earlier, Manueline-style turret.

It was King Emmanuel I who was responsible for abandoning the old fortress that one can see on the top of the hill in the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* and building a new palace in the commercial area of the city, thus symbolically prioritizing trade over politics or religion. Alongside the new palace, a large-scale scenic plaza was created, which has since been the stage for countless events. This connection of power to the River Tagus projected an image of a city open to the world: a metropolis forged with symbolism “in an urban-architectural metaphor of the power itself—imperial, commercial, and maritime.” The same could be said of another European city: Venice (Senos, 2002: 186–88).

The iconography of Lisbon proposed by the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* had been established in the 16th century, becoming a “model image” which then appeared in drawings, paintings, engravings, tile paintings, and more. The development of a standardized urban imagery shows that the options of the painters, publishers, and commissioners depended on the intended aims, whether these were propagandistic or symbolic. In the case of Lisbon, the city viewed from the south, in vedute (a highly detailed, large scale picture of an urban landscape or other some vista), presents two of its essential characteristics: its unequal topography and the prevalence of maritime activities. It is, after all, a metropolis in many ways defined by its relationship with the River Tagus (Pereira, 2006; Rossa, 2002: 87–116).

The *Great Panorama of Lisbon*, with its almost choreographic character, has variations in scale that create a hierarchy among the different areas of the city and the buildings. Those considered more important stand out; some have had their facades “rotated” so as to be more easily identifiable. All of them are recognizable through some identifying detail, in a face-on or bird’s-eye view. The larger-scale buildings that immediately call attention to themselves are the Ribeira Palace and the Corte Real Palace (inhabited by Peter II).
It is also important to realize that this panoramic view was customized for the situation in which the tiles would eventually be installed. Originally, the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* was to be applied in a palace, and although we do not know the exact layout of the room, it would almost certainly have had, as was common, several recesses of distinct dimensions. The tiles would thus not have been mounted in a single panel at eye level, but rather closer to the floor, in what is known as an ashlar pattern (which alters the way in which the buildings are perceived), in subsections of different dimensions depending on the spaces available between doors, windows, and other architectural items. As was usual at the time, the imagery would also have been surrounded by framing elements, acanthus leaves, or other decorations, at which we can only guess.

The dividing up of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*, which is difficult to reconstitute despite attempts made based on the dimensions and cuts that some of the tiles exhibit, would definitely have highlighted the area of the Terreiro do Paço, which probably would have been located in the center of the room. It is not by chance that in Vasconcelos’s work the stern of the *Trafaria Praia* is strategically occupied by the image of this same plaza, with the city unfolding from there, to port and starboard.

**Tiles in Portugal and the Practice of Joana Vasconcelos**

The tile, renowned worldwide, has been an art closely associated with Portuguese heritage since the end of the 15th century. Tiles are produced and applied in Portugal in an architectural manner, which is different from their function in most other European countries. Tiles cover the insides of churches, chapels, palaces, and other buildings, on the walls (whether entirely or in ashlar patterns) or sometimes in domes, partially or wholly covering the space in a way that almost always completely alters one’s perception of it. From the 19th century on, tiles were also applied on the outside facades of buildings in urban settings, often with a great rhythmic and chromatic dynamism.

In the middle of the 20th century there was a renewal of enthusiasm for tile production in Portugal, both on the formal and technical levels and in terms of the types of application. This was thanks to an emerging generation of artists and architects who were introducing a new dynamic. Their modern perspective encompassed multiple approaches, including the quoting of particular historical periods (Henriques, 2007: 99–110; Almeida, 2009: 93–102). Many artists worked on ceramic coverings in collaboration with architects for
public art projects. Some of these artists came up with designs that were carried out by technicians; others executed (or execute) their works themselves.

Vasconcelos is not a ceramicist per se. Rather, she often employs ceramics as just one of many material elements in her elaborate, complex sculptures. In her most recent project, *Trafaria Praia*—which is a “total” work, involving a ship, the pieces on the inside and outside, and the public programs taking place on the deck—Vasconcelos also uses tiles, but this time to quote and re-create an iconic work of Portuguese tile production, the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*. Inside the ferryboat she once again associates knitting with tiles, albeit indirectly, by creating a womblike atmosphere illuminated by LEDs set within the textile items. Vasconcelos’s practice is thus inscribed within a register of quoting the past. This is something common to several artists who used tiles in a symbolic manner in the middle of the 20th century, but she is updating works and subjects from history and Portuguese heritage in a more dazzling, and more ironic, manner (Amado, 2010: 44).

Tiles in the Transition from the 17th Century to the 18th Century

The *Great Panorama of Lisbon* was painted during a transitional phase between the intense polychromatic approach of the second half of the 17th century and the first quarter of the 18th century; this latter period is characterized by the so-called “great painting” and has become known as the “Cycle of the Masters,” which lasted from 1701 to 1725. The iconic blue-and-white palette was informed by Chinese porcelains, and most likely also by copies of European engravings and Portuguese commissions to Dutch tile workshops.

The exact date of completion of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* is not known. But identifying some of the buildings, as well as considering the piece’s place in the history of Portuguese painting—and specifically tile painting in Lisbon—have made it possible to date it to around 1700. José Meco’s estimate is the earliest, approximating it to have been made circa 1700 (Meco, 1981, 42; Meco, 1994: 85–113). After clarifying several issues related to the construction of certain buildings, Meco concluded that his proposed date was not incompatible with the iconography and architecture of Lisbon. Also, the attribution of the painting to del Barco limits its possible date range, as documentation of the Spanish painter is unknown after 1701. Recently presented data in the research project *Lisbon on Tiles Before the Earthquake*, which is connected to archaeological excavations that took place in certain areas of the city, seems to corroborate Meco’s estimate.
An approach that in my opinion has great significance but has not yet been deeply explored is a consideration of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* in the context of the history of Portuguese tile production—its main trends and lines of development (an idea also defended in Meco, 1994: 112). Comparing this work with other ceramic coverings from circa 1700 reveals strong similarities in visual language: the perspective, the not-very-precise drawing of the buildings and the city in general, and the very expressive and “tile-like” way of painting, which is a bit unsophisticated in its use of a spontaneous and dynamic brushstroke.

The *Great Panorama of Lisbon* does not match up so well with examples from the later “Cycle of the Masters.” Although these comparisons should always be made with caution, given that works made by tile painters tend to treat buildings merely as scenery for episodes taking place in the foreground, it is true that later works show much more rigor in the architectural drawings. On the other hand, and even taking into account that less sophisticated tile commissions from this period have been documented, it seems very unlikely that, in the middle of the “Cycle of the Masters,” and in Lisbon, a commissioner who wished to see his contemporary city represented on the walls of his palace would accept a work that was characteristic of the end of the 17th century when he could have opted for workshops of much higher quality, such as that of the Portuguese painter António de Oliveira Bernardes, a major figure of this movement.

If the exact dating of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* remains to be established with certainty, the same is true of its authorship; it has been examined in relation to a few different workshops that were active at the time. At the end of the 17th century and early in the 18th, a ceramic covering this elaborate would have been the outcome of a collaboration by several different artisans, including masters, apprentices, and officials. The tile maker played a central, controlling role in the process. He took on responsibility for the work for the commissioner, managed the practitioners, among whom the most important were the potter and the painter, and oversaw the final installation. The potter provided the tiles, which, after being painted, would be put in the oven again. The painter, along with various collaborators and apprentices in his workshop, was responsible for the making of the compositions. This network of collaborations and skills characterized what I term the “world of the potteries” (Carvalho, 2012).

The *Great Panorama of Lisbon* is not signed, the contract between the commissioner and the workshop is not extant, and there is no known documentation regarding who worked on it. This is often the case. In fact, knowing the tile maker, the potter, and the painter of a given work from this era is rare in the history of Portuguese tile production. The number

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The “Cycle of the Masters” is so called because of characteristics such as the quality of the painting (a result of the versatility of the artists, who practised different techniques); the erudition of the iconographic programs; the adaptation to the space (already an earlier tradition, the solutions for which varied according to the framework of each period); the exploration of the narrative nature of the tiles organized into panels (sections), as well as a decorative repertoire of their own and the whole scenographic dimension inherent to it, of which the fittings, which were often seen as veritable prosceniums, are examples.

Art historians have taken different perspectives, but all of them have based their conclusions on observations of the urban setting depicted. The best guess of Robert Smith is 1738 (Smith, 1968: 234) and Santos Simões has indicated 1735 (Simões, 1979: 210). In 1932 Vieira da Silva suggested 1734 (Silva, 1932: 80–91), then subsequently revised his estimate to the decade of the 1720s, and then further narrowed it down to circa 1725 (Simões, 1947: 23; Simões, 1961: 134).

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of known potters and tile makers is somewhat significant, but the same cannot be said of painters, who are not often mentioned in the documentation. However, there is enough documentation still extant, with names attached, regarding ceramic coverings that are still conserved in situ, to allow us to trace back the chronology of this art form to the last quarter of the 17th century. Indeed, it is clear that it was then a very active sector.

In this near-void of knowledge about the painters, the name of del Barco takes on significance, given that in the last decade of the 17th century he made more than 10 works, mainly in the region between Lisbon and the Alentejo, with a considerable number of these done between 1699 and 1700. He was of Spanish origin and came to Lisbon in 1669, accompanying the first ambassador from Castile, the French diplomat Charles Watteville de Joux (Simões, 1979: 20). He established close relationships with the artistic milieu in Lisbon and settled there. Between 1669 and 1689, the year of the first known ceramic covering made by him (main chapel of the Church of Espinheiro in Évora), he painted ceilings—which were destroyed in the 1755 earthquake—and there is no documentation of his activity as a tile painter (Correia, 1918: 166–78).

His characteristic way of painting, with unclear outlines and with a prevalent use of spots, using a technique that is relatively free from the trace, was no doubt influential on following generations (Meco, 1979a: 69–124; Meco, 1979b: 58–67; Meco, 1981: 41–50). There still exist complete ceramic coverings of churches and chapels by various artists. And the works by del Barco—such as the church of the former Convent of Lóios in Arraiolos or the Church of Santiago in Évora—are remarkable for their truly monumental expression and narrative dimension.

Two pictorial approaches can be discerned in del Barco’s works, often occurring simultaneously (Carvalho, 2011: 227–44). In some, especially the early ones, there is a prevalence of stained brushstrokes, washes, and parallel, thin, ordered brushstrokes; but there are also quick brushstrokes, and he used these increasingly in later works. Alongside these features one can see the emergence of concise drawings that stand out over the stain, and an almost caricatured aspect in the figures.
Some of del Barco’s artistic tendencies appear in the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*, but these were common to several other tile painters of the time. Also, what we know about the organization of the painting workshops almost certainly means that the work involved many collaborators, which increases the degree of difficulty in attributing the painting to a single author. And del Barco’s securely attributed works, whether signed or known to have been made by him, do not contain a sufficient number of significant buildings to allow a fruitful comparison with the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*.

In the absence of more specific data, then, we can only conclude that the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* might have been painted by del Barco, but we cannot abandon the idea that it may have been made in one of the several other anonymous workshops operating in Lisbon at the time. Without completely setting aside the del Barco hypothesis, which remains an important working premise, until further data comes to light, an approach that is less oriented toward singular authorship and considers the work rather as part of Lisbon’s thriving tile industry may actually impart greater value to the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* and other contemporaneous works.

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**The Past and the Present: the Great Panoramas of Lisbon**

Vasconcelos’s *Great Panorama of Lisbon (21st Century)* takes its inspiration from, and engages in dialogue with, the baroque *Great Panorama of Lisbon.* 9 In shooting the aerial photography that would become the basis for her work, she attempted to re-create the latter’s viewpoints; she had taken a first round of photographs from the level of the River Tagus, but discarded them when she realized they did not show the “correct” views of the city from above. Jorge Nesbitt was commissioned to make a series of drawings informed by these pictures, first in pencil and then in watercolor, in a technique similar to painting on tiles. These drawings were digitized, and the scale of each element was digitally corrected. They were then printed on tracing paper (thereby returning to an analogue mode) so they could be transposed to the tiles through a charcoal sketching process. The motifs were then painted by several artisans from the Vitúa Lamego ceramics factory.

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9 From an art historical point of view, and in terms of the history of Portuguese tile production, the confrontation between these two iconic works may become of great importance. In relation to Vasconcelos’s piece, one can consider that the photographs and the drawings based on them, which were then painted onto tiles, may be very useful in the reassessment, for example, of hypotheses about the creative process behind the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*. 
The process for the construction of the image of Lisbon in the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* would have been quite different. The painters of the time, on tiles and in other media, generally used prints in order to make their compositions. They borrowed engravings in their entirety or selected figures and episodes, which they recombined freely, creating new pictures based on a common European visual language. There are very few examples of ceramic coverings with specific iconographies that contain no references to prints.

There has been speculation about the specific origins of various portions of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*. Some art historians imagine that it resulted from drawings made on site on the River Tagus, possibly from the mast of a ship. One exception might perhaps be the turret of the Ribeira Palace, which was very possibly inspired by an engraving by the Dutch artist Dirk Stoop, from the series entitled *Embarkation of Dona Catarina de Braganza to England* dedicated to the wedding of Catherine of Braganza to Charles II of England (Meco, 1994: 108–9). The tile painter “rotated” this engraving, which may explain the problems of perspective it manifests. It would also explain the degree of detail that characterizes this building as opposed to many of the others.

In her work Vasconcelos maintained (although not totally strictly) the angles of observation of the *Great Panorama of Lisbon*. The most apparent differences involve the areas that now appear denser. The city has grown, and any empty spaces are now totally filled. The medieval, Manueline, flat, and Philippine architecture is now complemented with evidence of the Marquis de Pombal’s rebuilding of Lisbon’s downtown quarter, as well as many modern and contemporary buildings. All of these exist in dialogue with the earlier heritage, and together they create a stunning urban landscape.

In Vasconcelos’s work, as in the earlier one, there is a constant reinvention of the vanishing point and the horizon line, as well as a greater abundance of detail in certain areas, often motivated by artist’s personal knowledge of his or her city. Consider, for example, the characterization in the *Great Panorama of Lisbon* of the Mocambo quarter, with its orthogonal streets and the black smoke coming out of the chimneys of the potteries there. The
rigor and exactitude in the depiction of this zone indicates that the 17th century painter probably knew it well. It may have been where he lived, and it was very probably where he worked, and where the panel’s tiles were baked. The potteries have long disappeared from this area of the city, and the few ceramic factories that were established there have closed down. Thus, their smoke is not represented in Vasconcelos’s piece. It is a small detail to notice, but in many ways it emblematises the long time that has passed between the two Great Panoramas of Lisbon—between the baroque era and our contemporary one.

Bibliography


