“The Pine Tree of Pena” - 28 November 2019 to 6 January 2020

National Palace of Pena unveils an unprecedented reconstruction of Ferdinand II’s Christmas Tree

- Ferdinand II introduced the Christmas tree tradition to the Portuguese court as well as designing and sending the first greetings card
- An unprecedented initiative both in Portugal and the international context
- Installation results from historical and iconographic research
- This includes scale reproductions of the decorations and toys according to traditional production techniques

Sintra, 9 December 2019 – The National Palace of Pena this Christmas commemorates an unprecedented historical reconstruction of the Christmas Tree of Ferdinand II – the “Pine Tree of Pena” – which shall remain on display in the Noble Hall up until 6 January, the Day of the Epiphany. Ferdinand II, who was the monarch responsible for the construction of this Palace, is recognised as the historical figure that introduced the habit of evoking the festive season with a decorated pine tree to the Portuguese court. During the reign of Queen Maria II, Christmas at the Necessidades Palace (in Lisbon) was celebrated around a pine tree especially brought there from the Park of Pena in Sintra. The memory of these occasions was left to us by Ferdinand II through two engravings he made and that provide a visual witness account that was accompanied by the broad historical research that underpins the accuracy of this reconstruction.

The engravings by this Artist King display the pine tree as the centrepiece of the celebrations, decorated in candles with diverse fruits and, around the base of the trunk, the toy presents for the young princes and princesses. The children are depicted in a family ambience and, in one of these depictions, they are admiring the arrival of Saint Nicholas, who was the king himself dressed in full Santa costume. The installation on display in the National Palace of Pena, which, as from this year, may be observed by all visitors to the monument during the festive season, is an exact scale reproduction of the
Christmas decorations and gifts that Ferdinand II himself depicted. These result from a specialist manufacturing process based on historical knowledge and techniques gathered by the Palace team who made recourse to identical materials to the originals coupled with traditional production techniques.

This project, which accounted for investment of around € 20,000, falls within the scope of the ongoing work on the interiors of the National Palace of Pena that strives to bring about the historical reconstruction of the domestic ambiances that constituted the daily lives of the Royal Family in this monument. Within this objective, thorough historical research has taken place based upon documental and iconographic sources and with their implementation counting on the contributions made by renowned masters and producers in the national and international markets.

The first greetings card designed in Portugal
The Christmas Tree is not the only Christmas tradition that Ferdinand II brought to the Portuguese Royal Family. The monarch also designed and produced the first known greetings card in the country, which dates to 1839 and was sent to his family members. The cards were individually engraved with the National Palace of Pena collection containing a small album of engravings that still preserves an example. The British royal collections contain at least two examples of this card. One is addressed to Queen Victoria and features in an album that she herself compiled.

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