

ABEL ARMANDO SILVA, LDA.

Silence reigns over the skill and the painstaking detail of the gold threads, oblivious to the spectacle that Nature is putting on outside the window facing the valley, painted in green with splashes of red from the roof tiles and daubs of white from the whitewashed walls. Sunlight filters through the workshop, as vital as life-giving air for the jewels to come to life, glorified by the hands of master Filigree artisans.

Rosa has been an artisan for as long as she can recall. The wall of her workshop carries a portrait of her father, Abel, just one memento of him. Her heart carries countless memories.

Abel worked only with silver because he could not afford to buy gold. He was a great-grandson of the “orphan of Travassos”, a man who is remembered to this day for the art of goldsmithing and the art of wooing the local girls. Abel spent countless hours producing rosaries, reliquaries and crosses out of Filigree to sell at Fátima, altar of the world. Now, Rosa continues in her father's footsteps. Her story as a Filigree artisan started to be written before she was even in her mother's womb, guided by the strong religious conviction she inherited from her family. Her mother was church caretaker and pilgrimages and processions have always been part of Rosa's life. She would take part in decorating the pilgrimage arches with hundreds of paper flowers in the churchyard. From the balconies, linen and lace covers paid homage to Our Lady of Goma, the village's patron saint, carried upon shoulders atop a float and showered with gift offerings and vows. Rosa, her mother, and the village women proudly wore their best jewels to the pilgrimage. All made by her father in Filigree, of course.

Rosa instilled in her father a hope for the future of Filigree, encouraging him to apply for certification and to invest in design that joins tradition with innovation, to rewrite the grammar of Filigree as if it was poetry.

Rosa's passion has passed to her children, Daniel and Andrea. Three other artisans work alongside them in the workshop since they were children: Marisa, Luís and João. They have worked in the art since their school days as they would spend their afternoons in the workshop after classes, “learning the art” as they proudly put it, without taking their eyes off the pieces they are working on.

João knows the crucible like no-one else. It bears the marks of time and use, making it a relic and a jewel of emotional contours. Once the metal has melted, João goes back to the reliquaries. Luís is honing his art on a Crucifix and Marisa is busy with the complex shapes of the Cane cross. From the pan to the blowtorch, the mould, the pliers, the snips and the tweezers, each jewel leaving those hands has a story to tell. Or many, invariably blessed by Saint Elói, the patron saint of goldsmiths and jewellers, who has pride of place here.

Outside, the church bells ring, calling Rosa to mass. She carries with her a rosary with a Filigree cross that used to belong to her mother, counting the Viana beads to the rhythm of her prayer. And of her heart.

Texts by Sónia Felgueiras

Enchant yourself with the story
of Rosa in video

