

J. MONTEIRO SOUSA & FILHOS, LDA.

“I am concerned with making beautiful things.” Jorge is a tall, quiet man. He prefers his jewels to speak for him, as he cannot find the words and because, really, his jewels need no verbal description.

Jorge grew up in the midst of Filigree, a skill he inherited from his father and grandfather, whom he accompanied every Sunday afternoon in the churchyard to revel in the folk music played by the band in the village bandstand. He gazes into nowhere and gets lost in the time and memories. Life was hard. His grandfather often mortgaged out the sewing machine so he could afford to buy silver with which to make Filigree jewellery. Doing so, he mortgaged out his wife’s dreams: she had learned another skill from her mother before her: working with thread, thimbles, braids, linen and taffeta, ribbon and silk cord, elastic, buttons, and zips.

When he was 19, Jorge took on his grandfather's workshop. Despite that, he's adamant: “I'm no master jeweller. I never was. The masters are downstairs, in the workshop.” Jorge is well aware of what his greatest treasures are. Not even the imposing Filigree Barcelos Cockerel, Portuguese Caravel, D. Luís Bridge or *Fabergé* Egg, jewels he displays proudly as works made in his workshop, can take the place of the crown's rightful owners: the Filigree artisans, the goldsmiths and *enchedeiras* (fillers).

Hunched over a “fish scale” Olga is deftly putting together. She has been an *enchadeira* (filler) in Jorge's workshop for over 50 years. She learned from her mother on the kitchen table along with her four sisters. Back then, women couldn't leave the house to go to work. “I love what I do,” she says with the poise of her many years. “I don't want this art to end, because after seeing a finished jewel I like it even more!”

Olga specializes in fish scales, one of Filigree's many styles of filling, but also in s-shapes, cards, *crespos* (cone shapes) and “kissing s-shapes”. She particularly likes the latter, two s-shapes that rise to meet in the middle. Then she smiles innocently. She has done this all her life and wouldn't know how to do anything else. She wouldn't want to, either.

Sitting next to her, Ricardo has been a goldsmith for 51 years, since leaving primary school. He started work aged eight as a carpenter, engrossed in the world of wood. But his mother was an *enchadeira* (filler) and Filigree was in his blood, even though he didn't know it. It is a lonely work, and Ricardo sits in conversation with his art, always in complicity with silence. “I draw out the threads and make the skeleton. I make it with thin-wall spirals then I pass it over to Olga, who fills it.”

The work of the artisans' hands is art with History. It is much more than even they can imagine. It is heritage and national identity. They perpetuate a legacy going back generations, knowing that it takes more than a goldsmith to shape the Filigree: it also takes someone who can fill it with incredibly thin threads. It is an art only they can perform. Tweezers, a snip, thread in their hands, and wisdom, because artisans are to Filigree what essence is to perfume.

Texts by Sónia Felgueiras

Enchant yourself with the story
of Olga in video

