

The Estremoz Clay Figures production, usually known as "Bonecos de Estremoz", is a craft with more than three centuries and it is part of the cultural identity of the Estremoz county.

More than 100 different figures are inventoried and every day new themes are created, always in relation with the everyday of the Alentejo people, in its rural and urban aspects.

The skilful hands that handle the clay give life to the typical figures that, with its bright colours and unique shapes, charm everyone that passes through Estremoz, like the "Altar Christmas Crib", "Love is Blind", "Spring", "Gentlemen and Little Gentlemen" and the "Queen Saint Isabel" figures.

Please accept our invitation and walk through our city, with time and patience, where you can appreciate and buy, in the several shops and workshops, these so very genuine figures that our craftsmen make.

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Bonecos de Estremoz

Estremoz Clay Figures 



**Intangible Cultural  
Heritage of Humanity**  
*Património Cultural Imaterial da Humanidade*



**VIVE  
ESTREMOZ**



# ESTREMOZ CLAY FIGURES

## BRIEF HISTORY

The first known references to Estremoz Clay Figures are from the beginnings of the 18th Century. In 1770, it's known the existence of the "boniqueiras", craftswomen who manufactured these figures and whose work wasn't recognized as a trade.

These figures were certainly influenced with spiritual needs and people wanted these little saints in their homes for devotional purposes. To buy the figures in carved wood was expensive, so, we suppose, somewhere near these dates, a woman, accustomed to handle clay, may have decided to make a clay saint of her devotion. Probably, this was the beginning of this tradition, in a territory where clay was abundant.

Due to the expansion of the "Escola de Mafra" Christmas Crib style, the craftsmanship started to include also Nativity motifs. The scholarly Crib, present in convents and wealthy families' homes, soon were adapted to the craftswomen popular worldliness. So, around the Holy Family scene, other scenes emerged, as the "Three Wisemen", the regional "Offerers" and a vast repertoire, as "Shepherd Eating", "Shepherd Sleeping", "Woman with Chicken", the "Shepherd carrying a Lamb", just to give some examples. Today, these figures survive outside the Christmas Crib. In the 19th century, men started to "meddle" in this art, according to an account by craftswoman Georgina, who said to Sebastião Pessanha, somewhere in the early 20th century, to have learned the craft from her husband.

In 1935, José Maria Sá Lemos, the Principal of the Estremoz Industrial School, convinced the craftswoman Ti Ana das Peles, who only knew how to make "Whistles", to teach her trade and to participate in the "resurrection" of the Estremoz Clay Figures that no one already used to make since the 1920's.

From these fortunate know-how encounters, is born the Alfacinha Potters Family taste by the Estremoz Clay Figures, namely Mariano da Conceição, who passes it to some of his Pottery's employees and to relatives.

Nowadays, the craftsmen are the Flores Sisters (Irmãs Flores), Fátima Estróia, Afonso and Matilde Ginja, Duarte Catela and Ricardo Fonseca. Using the traditional techniques, but with local and contemporary models, are Isabel Pires, Jorge da Conceição, Célia Freitas and Miguel Gomes.

The Estremoz Clay Figures production is inscribed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage National Inventory, since 2014, and, since December 7th 2017, on the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

