

EX-VOTOS: PROMISE, FAITH, AND GRATITUDE - INTERNSHIP, CONCEPTS, AND PRACTICES AT THE SÃO FRANCISCO CULTURAL CENTER

Bruna Sales de Sousa¹

ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the activities carried out during the internship at the São Francisco Cultural Center, elucidating the procedures and interventions undertaken throughout the internship period and theoretically linking them to texts that were instrumental in underpinning practical activities. A curated exhibition titled "Ex-votos: Promise, Faith, and Gratitude" was prepared during the internship, utilizing the collection from the field. The internship at the São Francisco Cultural Center facilitated a deeper understanding of ex-votos and the entire dynamics inherent to the field, providing insights into new intervention practices that can be developed in the field of Religious Sciences.

Keywords: Internship. Ex-votos. Religious Science.

INTRODUCTION

The present article aims to present the activities carried out during the internship at the São Francisco Cultural Center (CCSF), located in the downtown area of João Pessoa - PB. The internship had the overall objective of curating and culturally producing an exhibition of ex-votos from the collection of CCSF (São Francisco Cultural Center). The specific objectives were: build curatorial thinking; research and select artworks; produce the curatorial text; develop the visual identity of the exhibition; and organize the exhibition's display.

In this space, I come to elucidate the knowledge acquired, the challenges faced, and reflections on my own experience. Scientific articles were used to underpin the literature review, and, above all, a theoretical framework was established to support practical activities.

The performance in the internship allows students to relate the theoretical contents covered in various disciplines of the curriculum with the

¹ Student of the Bachelor's degree program in Religious Sciences at UFPB. E-mail: brunah2006@hotmail.com



practices to be developed in the field, aiming to build skills and competencies that can equip them for their future professional activities. Thus, the correlation between theory and practice provided by supervised internships is of fundamental importance for a solid education.

The practices developed within supervised internships provide an expanded perspective on the various areas of activity within Religious Sciences, as well as the diverse activities that can be undertaken in various fields where a Bachelor's degree holder in Religious Sciences may operate. Therefore, in this report, we will present the activities carried out, our perceptions of them, and how the field contributed to grounding our learning.

CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES AT THE SÃO FRANCISCO CULTURAL CENTER

The internship was conducted at the São Francisco Cultural Center (CCSF), located in the downtown area of João Pessoa - PB. On the first day of the internship, we were welcomed by a CCSF collaborator who would be our supervisor. The internship's proposal was to organize an artistic exhibition of ex-votos to take place within the CCSF itself, featuring a collection of approximately 200 pieces of various typologies from the institution's own technical reserve. The event was scheduled for November of the same year, coinciding with the celebration of "Nossa Senhora da Penha", a significant Catholic festivity in our city. Our goal was to connect the exhibition with the pilgrimage of "Nossa Senhora da Penha".

In the initial phase, the teacher provided some important information for the realization of an art exhibition. As a starting point, guidance was given on the roles of a curator and a cultural producer. The curator's specific objective is direct contact with the artist and overseeing the entire exhibition. Thus, in almost all cases, the curator is chosen by the artist, as this is a relationship built on trust between them. Curating involves selecting pieces and organizing the space to showcase the entire collection selected for the exhibition's big day. On the other hand, the cultural producer's role involves

handling the bureaucratic aspects, as they are responsible for calls for submissions, sponsorships, and all aspects of exhibition funding.

We could understand that organizing an art exhibition requires care, planning, and attention to details, with the crucial priority being the definition of its theme and purposes. Based on this, the focus shifts to choosing the venue and establishing a timeline for the entire creation process. After aligning all these points, we proceed to organize and structure the entire exhibition.

At another juncture, an initial contact was made with the collection of ex-votos at CCSF. All pieces underwent conservation and cleaning processes. Faced with a wealth of new information, a lengthy debate ensued regarding the selection of a name for the exhibition, and collectively, the following title was decided upon: 'EX-VOTOS: FAITH, PROMISE, AND GRATITUDE. On the same day, some dates were decided for the organization and construction of the exhibition. There was also a meeting with the artist Wilson Figueiredo, who was displaying his works at the venue. He is a visual artist, draftsman, painter, and sculptor, born in the city of Patos - PB. The theme of his exhibition was 'Magical Studio by Wilson Figueiredo.' He spoke a bit about the construction of an exhibition, the curator's role, and the artist's trust in the curator's perspective, as it is the curator who selects the pieces for the exhibition. Figueiredo showcased his pieces and presented each one with care and admiration. In the end, everyone was requested to conduct research on the concept of ex-votos and to read some articles on the subject to collaboratively develop the texts for the exhibition's curatorial content.

Through research, we were able to learn the etymology of the word 'ex-voto,' which originated from the Latin term ex-voto. The preposition 'ex-' signifies 'because of, in virtue of,' and 'voto' comes from 'votum,' meaning 'vow'—related to 'votum,' derived from 'vovére' ('to make a vow, bind oneself, promise in a vow, offer, dedicate, and consecrate'). In general, in illustrative publications and dictionaries, an ex-voto is described as a drawing, sculpture, photograph, piece of clothing, jewelry, lock of hair, or any other object offered or displayed in chapels, churches, or halls of miracles in rejoicing for favors

granted. Furthermore, in this context, we could observe that, in some compilations, the ex-voto appears as an offering given after a vow formulated and answered by the gods, in the times of paganism; to God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints in the era of Christianity, during times of distress, mortal illness, danger of death to domestic animals, and similar situations. The understanding that prevails is that the ex-voto is an object of gratitude from the faithful for the grace they have received. Moving into a conceptual discussion, we can define what an ex-voto is and how it is discussed in the literature. Leite (2013, p. 86) defines the ex-voto as "a religious practice that provides a representation of the body with reference to the notion of belonging and certain foundational aspects of the idea of identity and communication." Melo (2015, p. 214) conceptualizes the ex-voto as "paintings, letters, plaques with inscriptions, figures sculpted in wood or wax—representing parts of the human body—that are placed in a church or chapel, as a fulfillment of a vow or in gratitude for a favor received." Teixeira et al. (2010, p. 122) assert that "the ex-voto constitutes a religious, artistic, and cultural expression characterized by the practice of offering to saints as a way of expressing gratitude for promises fulfilled." Therefore, "the ex-votive practice has been occurring since antiquity and, even today, is present in major Christian shrines" (MELO, 2015, p. 215). The author further argues that this form of human interaction and "communication" with the divine is a practice observed in all eras and cultures (MELO, 2015). Leite (2015, p. 215) asserts that "it is believed that the ex-votive practice arrived in Brazil through the tradition of Portuguese navigators because, according to the customs of the time, a similar ritual was used to thank the saints for the safe survival of another sea voyage." Abreu (2005, p. 208) points out that "the diffusion of votive practice is closely related to pilgrimage, one of the oldest Christian practices that held a prominent place in the piety of the faithful since the Middle Ages."

Duarte (2010) explains that when devotees obtain the desired grace, they offer an object in satisfaction to their intercessor for the blessing received. In this way, the beneficiary presents an ex-voto to their intercessor, which is

represented through objects, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs. According to Teixeira et al. (2010, p. 122),

The offered ex-votos reveal the ways in which subjectivities are constructed, as devotees commission the object according to their particular characteristics, emphasizing the unique aspects of their suffering and the grace obtained. This highlights cultural aspects that guide social representations of health, suffering, faith, religion, and society.

Duarte (2010, p. 17) says that

These objects are mostly parts of the human body, sculpted in wax, wood, or paraffin, painted on wood, fabric, paper; braided locks of hair; orthopedic devices; car steering wheels; replicas of shrines, and there are still others that attract more attention, such as wedding dresses, crosses of various shapes, bicycles, coffins, and various items of different natures.

As for the definition of pilgrimage, one of the themes of the exhibition, we can conceptualize it based on Nascimento's proposition (1998), which defines pilgrimage as a religious activity carried out with the aid of various means of transportation. Pilgrims cover distances over kilometers and, in some cases, take several days to reach sanctuaries where masses, confessions, baptisms, visits to sacred images, receipt of blessings, fulfillment of vows, and the performance of penances take place—essentially where they come into genuine contact with the sacred.

In preparation for the grand exhibition day, the location for the event was decided. We chose and set aside all the display stands to be painted in white, as decided in the previous meeting. The teacher suggested taking photos of the stops during the procession of “Nossa Senhora da Penha” and using these photos to showcase the entire route of the procession in the ex-voto exhibition. This would link the festivity of the “Nossa Senhora da Penha” procession to the ex-voto exhibition. We gathered some ex-votos and display stands and began a brief rehearsal of what the exhibition would look like. A theoretical activity was conducted, presenting the general and specific objectives of our internship activities, and at the end, there was a discussion about the texts that would be part of the curatorial presentation at the exhibition.

Given the connection between the ex-voto exhibition and the pilgrimage of “Nossa Senhora da Penha”, it is important to highlight that this pilgrimage is one of the most significant in Brazil. It takes place in November, with a 14-kilometer walk from the Church of “Nossa Senhora de Lourdes” to the Sanctuary of Penha. According to local media, the event gathers around 500 thousand believers. More than just a religious celebration, the pilgrimage is a cultural manifestation of the greater João Pessoa area that attracts tourists and believers throughout the entire week in which it occurs.

In the final adjustments of the internship, CCSF presented the final model of the invitation, which was reviewed and approved by the entire group. This collaborator also outlined the entire route of the pilgrimage of Our Lady of Penha, which would be represented by photos in the exhibition. On this day, we also conducted a final survey of the space. It is important to note that all the final organization of the ex-voto exhibition was taken care of by CCSF. Consequently, there was a slight change in the event's name, at the designer's request for aesthetic reasons. In this regard, the exhibition, now, has the final name: "EX-VOTOS: PROMISE, FAITH, AND GRATITUDE."

On October 24, 2023, we had the conclusion of practical classes at CCSF. Consequently, all the final organization was handled by CCSF. The exhibition will be open to the public on November 24, 2023, at 3:00 PM, the day before the pilgrimage of “Nossa Senhora da Penha”.

These were days of significant learning that resulted in a tremendous gain in my academic and personal life. Experiencing in practice what I have been studying was fundamental. This hands-on experience opened my eyes to an immense field of work that the Religious Sciences course will unveil for me. It was an incredible experience of great learning and exchange.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To stimulate debate on the subject and broaden the creative universe for our academic development, the internship was of fundamental importance. It allowed us to ground our practices and fuel our research in the area where

the internship took place. Reading the selected texts, conversations with invited professionals, guided tours, and the practical activities during the pre-exhibition, exhibition, and post-exhibition phases all contributed to our development as scholars of religion, providing us with theoretical and practical foundations.

The internship at CCSF provided a better understanding of ex-votos and the entire dynamics of the field, enabling me to comprehend new intervention practices that could be developed in the field of Religious Sciences. The internship also allowed me to develop skills and knowledge through the activities carried out with professionals working at CCSF.

The curricular internship is crucial in the academic training of educators, facilitating the integration of theory and practice. In this way, during the internship, we invest all our expectations created in the field of work. However, in our Religious Sciences department, we did not have practical internships before. Therefore, it was with immense satisfaction that we joined the first group of practical internships. It was a moment of great joy and learning because it was enriching to see how necessary we are and to confirm that our work as researchers is valuable and decisive.

Finally, the importance of supervised internship as a fundamental component in academic training has been demonstrated. The internship period provided us with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and highlighted important elements for our future professional careers. It allowed us to see our significance as researchers in the field of work.

REFERENCES

ABREU, Jean Luiz Neves. Difusão, produção e consumo das imagens visuais: o caso dos ex-votos mineiros do século xviii. **Revista Brasileira de História**, [s.l.], v. 25, n. 49, p. 197-214, jan. 2005.

DUARTE, Ana Helena da Silva Delfino. Ex-votos e poiesis: representações simbólicas na fé e na arte. **Tese de doutorado** — Programa de Pós-graduação em História, Pontifícia Universidade Católica, São Paulo, 2010.

LEITE, Rodrigo Reis. Ex-Voto: O ritual da corporeidade. **Interfaces**



Científicas - Humanas e Sociais, v. 2, n. 1, p. 85-96, 2013.
<https://doi.org/10.17564/2316-3801.2013v2n1p85-96>

MELO, Wdson C. Freire de. Para além da devoção: o ex-voto entre a espontaneidade, o sintoma e o sofrimento psíquico. **Revista Expedições: Teoria da História e Historiografia**, Goiás, v. 6, n. 1, p. 213-223, 2015.

NASCIMENTO, Silvana. A romaria do Divino Pai Eterno. **TRAVESSIA - Revista Do Migrante**, n. 31, p. 13-16, 1998.
<https://doi.org/10.48213/travessia.i31.634>

TEIXEIRA, Leônia Cavalcante. et al. O corpo em estado de graça: ex-votos, testemunho e subjetividade. **Psicologia & Sociedade**, [s. l.], v. 22, n. 1, p. 121-129, abr. 2010.