

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

PORTABLE TOILET

Zinc, wood and porcelain

H. 43 x L. 46 x D. 32 cm

19th Century

MAH.1993.0452

'Tis noted as the nature of a sink,
Ever the more it is stirred, the more to stink.

John Harington, *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject,
Called The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, 1596¹.

The hygienic use of water, as we know it today, only became commonplace since the 19th century.

Usually, the majority of people did their physiological needs outside of their homes, in the so-called “private”, as Gil Vicente himself mentioned in one of his comedies.

The toilets were the exception, the *secret ones* and the latrines, only found in the houses of great opulence, where slaves or servants were in charge of their disposal – due to the specificity of that function, they received the designation of calhandreiras.

They also cleaned the ones that, for the purpose of transportation also had a lid, could circulate through the interior of the housing space, ensuring this way, without causing the exhalation of unpleasant odors, their permanence. Some fitted into chairs and were an integral part of the furniture of the wealthiest houses, as can be read in some post-mortem inventories in Lisbon from the early 19th century.

This toilet integrated in the Angra do Heroísmo Museum Decorative and Applied Arts Collection, already with a wooden seat, a decorated porcelain interior vase and lid comes from a wealthy house of this city.

¹ The author, godson Queen Elizabeth I of Inglaterra, was considered the first inventor of a toilet flush.