

# Waiting for Success



## Esperando o Sucesso

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Figure 1- “Esperando o Sucesso (Waiting for Success)”, 1882. Henrique Pousão. Oil on canvas, 131.5 x 83.5 cm. Soares dos Reis National Museum, Porto, Portugal.

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Henrique Pousão was a portuguese painter who worked during the naturalist generation. He was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1859 in Lisbon and died on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1884 in Vila Viçosa, due to tuberculosis, at the young age of 25.<sup>1</sup>

His father's profession, a court magistrate, led the family to live in several places. He undertook his artistic studies at the *Academia Portuense de Belas-Artes* (in Porto) between 1872 and 1879. In 1880, he was admitted to the Paris Beaux-Arts School. Thereafter he lived and painted in Rome, Capri and Naples. His illness forced him to return to Portugal at the end of 1883, where he died six months later from tuberculosis. After the painter's death, his father donated his artistic estate to the *Academia Portuense de Belas-Artes*, reuniting it with his previous school works. All this remarkable set of his painting is gathered at the Soares dos Reis National Museum, in the city of Porto.

*Esperando o Sucesso (Waiting for success)* is one of the most well known and joyful works from the Italian period, representing a boy, a very typical model of a *ciociaro* (peasant) from the surroundings of Rome, attired in his typical costume and sandals. The naughty smile of the boy, his complicity with the painter, the open and deep look represent a joy and trusting message in future, despite the terrible life conditions of those times, when compared with today's world.<sup>2</sup>

Society in general, social scientists, doctors, parents, should be vigilant of the mental health of our youngsters.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly important in view of a return to a world of

anxiety, depression, lack of hope in the future. It is necessary to do all we can to invert this tendency: "At my school, they have not yet realized that suboptimal school performance may be reduced with music, theatre and sports, instead of more of the same namely more classes and more tests".<sup>4</sup>

Tuberculosis at the end of nineteenth century was almost always deadly. Mortality in its more severe forms stood close to 75% at 5 years. At that time, nearly 20% of deaths in France were caused by tuberculosis. It was also by then, around 1880, when it was realized that it was a contagious disease.

Many famous people had tuberculosis,<sup>5</sup> like Chopin, Goethe, Paganini, Gauguin, Kafka. Those who died with the disease include: a Portuguese writer, Júlio Dinis (1839 - 1871), a Portuguese poet, Cesário Verde (1855 - 1886), D. Pedro I (IV of Portugal), King of Brazil (1798 - 1834) and George Orwell (1903 - 1950), a British writer.<sup>6</sup>

*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacillus which causes the disease, was described in 24<sup>th</sup> March 1882 by Robert Koch, curiously matching the year when Henrique Pousão, at the age of 23, created this joyful painting.<sup>7</sup> Robert Koch would receive the Medicine Nobel Prize in 1905.

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