

Leiria Museum (Leiria, Portugal)

For “Plasticity - a History of Plastics in Portugal (Plasticidade - uma História dos Plásticos em Portugal)”

Plasticidade—uma História dos Plásticos em Portugal (Plasticity—A History of Plastics in Portugal) uses artifacts, photographs, advertisements, newspaper clippings, and oral history interviews to tell two interconnected stories. The first considers the industrial transformation of the Portuguese city of Leiria, whose glass molding workshops were well-positioned to capitalize on the emergence of new synthetic materials at the start of the 20th century. The exhibition reconstructs Leiria’s emergence as a key center for plastic manufacturing in Portugal and the consequences of that transition on factory workers, technical experts, business leaders, and local consumers. At the same time, Plasticidade explores the social, technical, and environmental issues associated with the proliferation of synthetic materials. Winding their way through the exhibition, visitors encounter a variety of objects that illustrate the extent to which plastics have, for good or ill, pervaded our lives. The Museu de Leiria should be commended for curating an exhibition that considers the tangible consequences of society’s growing reliance on plastic that is informed by both the experiences of local stakeholders and the latest international scholarship.