

Jessica Micallef

INT 415

Bernardi

November 19th, 2017

Modernism Through the Eyes of a Brazilian Modernist

“Modernism was not conceived as a style but a loose collection of ideas” this was said in a lecture by Jose Bernardi. It represents the idea that during the era of modernism, all countries were at different levels with architecture and design. They were individually being influenced by their cultures and resources and also other parts of the world. Each country had their own starting idea of what modernism was. This “collection of ideas” was about being progressive with design, and how the influences of movements and new discoveries is what inspired this new era of modernist design. Specifically Brazilian modern architecture seems to have succeeded in adapting ideas formulated by the European avant-garde. Brazil’s openness to the landscape and having a strong cultural appreciation is shown through the use of textures and materials. It is shown in the work of three architects; Burle Marx, Luis Barragan, and Lina Bo Bardi by introducing, embodying, and creating the identity of Modernism in Brazil.

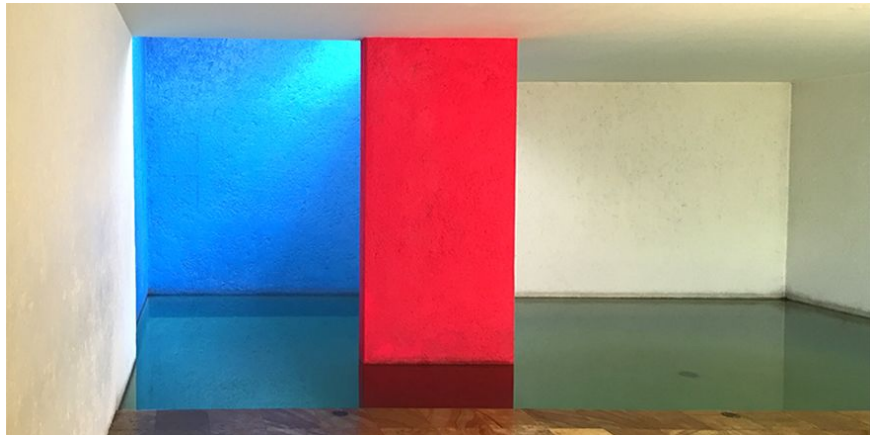
Burle Marx **introduced** modernist landscape architecture with this new idea of intermixing the discoveries of new plants with design. Throughout his work, he combines the preservation of Brazilian nature and tradition and the boldness of modernism. Brazil’s coastal forests are home



to one of the greatest arrays of plant diversity. In his lifetime he went on numerous expeditions to find plants with special context. For example, he once looked for plants that grew on rock surfaces. Which became a huge discovery for their potential for gardens created on paving or slab surfaces (Tabacow, Jose). A feature like this became key parts in some of his projects such as a rooftop

garden on the top of the Banco Safra Headquarters. After observing these natural environments through his expeditions, he reproduced their colors and textures, foregrounded their efflorescence, and made lavish use of contrasts to bring out differences between dominant and dominated elements (A Different Kind of Modernism) in design. The gardens, squares, and parks that he has created are landmarks that are part of the identity of modern Brazil. It was his Botanist friends who showed him how to see landscape as a whole, indivisible unit. He had uncovered a new concept of design by showing the relationships found in nature and bringing them to a garden composition. This was such a new idea during the modernist period that started to link people with nature and progress.

Luis Barragan **embodied** the modernist movement in architecture by being creative, thoughtful, and simple. Spoken in Jose Bernardi's lecture: "Barragan adopted the aesthetic techniques and visual discoveries of modernism without embracing the ideology of modernity. His divergent attitude consisted on a critical distancing from the core values of his own time". With his work, he dared to deviate from the glass, steel and concrete materials of Modernist masters in Europe. He took his appreciation of his culture and religion to blend that "starkness of simplicity with the natural elements that utilized and accentuated the mexican terrain and color scheme", (Williams). While still using long planar walls and reflective still



water elements such as representing in his Casa Gilardi. Instead of reveling in sleek, monochromatic surfaces, he incorporated Mexican building materials and bright startling colors. He developed a strong interest in the local techniques, which then led him to study the construction methods and art work of Mexican buildings. Yes his brightly painted exterior and interior walls seem to stand out compared to other great modern pieces of the time - specifically Europe - however they hardly stand out in the context of their urban environment in Brazil. He had this ability to mold his buildings into the landscape rather than copying the modern European models. All the while still having this modernistic attitude. The use of native plants

and the manipulation of natural light were trademarks of his architecture. This set him apart as a genius in both modernism and cultural appreciation in Brazil.

Lina Bo Bardi **created** a new dialogue for modernism with the use of contrast. She was about modern ideals as her take on modern architecture was promoting the possibilities of transforming Brazil in the direction of progress through thought and conversation. "In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from conformism that is about to overpower it" (De Oliveria, 15). She had this strong concern for culture, tradition, and history and in her work she represented it by trying to link different elements to express her ideas. The only two residential houses she ever built were the Valeria Cirell House in Sao Paulo and the Chame-Chame House in Salvador.



spark the thought of new interpretations on modernist design. Yes, modernism in architecture was all about new materials, new technologies; it was a new movement. Bo Bardi creates

a modern "dialogue between these two houses, apparent opposites, allowing us to penetrate a world divided between natural and artificial, feminine and masculine, public and private, ancient and modern, curvaceous and rectilinear, ordered and casual, airborne and grounded, clear and opaque, real and imaginary" (De Oliveria, 11) and the list goes on. One might think that with such a contrast of design, how does she create her own identifier. With using different materials and whatever available resources within the area, she also uses a combination of components that proliferate throughout her architecture; "This constant repetition of the same component in different buildings, times and places causes all notions of chronology to be diluted in her architecture, and means that all the work can be read together, as if mixed and superimposed in a melting pot." (De Oliveria, 13) Some architects thought modern design was starting over new, whereas Bo Bardi pushed for keeping the tradition but building from it to generate a conversation. The modern era was all about new inspirations and new dialogue and that's what her architecture was all about.

These three architects all embodied different ideas of how they wanted to represent architecture in Brazil during the period of modernism. Whether it was Marx introducing a new concept by incorporating new species into the landscape, or Barragan embodying a blend of simplicity and color-blocking structures with natural light, or even Bo Bardi creating a new dialogue of ambition to promote the social and cultural potential of architecture and design. These “loose collections of ideas” from these three Brazilian architects are just one example of how modernism was represented during that time. Brazil gained its own authenticity in design that rebelled against the European influence. And it is shown that these three architects were inspired by the culture and land to help generate Brazil’s own modernistic expression.

Citations

“A Different Kind of Modernism: The Humanistic Vision of Roberto Burle Marx.” *ArtMag*, Deutsche Bank, 10 July 2017

Bernardi, Jose. Lecture on Brazil, INT 415 Latin American Design Fall 2017

De Oliveria, Olivia. “Introduction”. *Subtle Substances. The Architecture of Lina Bo Bardi*. Gustavo Gili 2006.

Hansmann, Della. “Pioneering Modernist: Luis Barragan.” *Moss Architecture*, DISQUS, 6 Mar. 2016

Tabacow, Jose. “The Science of Perception”. *Roberto Burle Marx: The Modernity of Landscape*. Cité de l’architecture & du patrimoine/. 11, November 2017

Williams, Lily. “The Forgotten Modernist | Architect Luis Barragán.” *Culture Trip*, 15 Jan. 2015