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Promoting Brazil with Modern Architecture

Aleca Le Blanc

MAX BILL AND THE POLEMICS OF BRAZILIAN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

1. This refers specifically to the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, which were the two principal cities in Brazil at this time in respect of politics, industry and financial matters, as well as arts and culture. Belo Horizonte, in the nearby state of Minas Gerais, was also an important city, as was Salvador de Bahia, the capital of the north-eastern state of Bahia. The histories of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have dominated narratives of Brazil but are not intended to be representative of the entire nation.

2. This large steel sculpture, in the shape of a Möbius strip, exemplified Bill's principles of purely rational and premeditated Concrete Art and, having entered into the collection of the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, was still widely celebrated in Brazil two years after the award. Bill's popularity in the early 1950s is also a consequence of Brazilian artists embracing Concrete Art, the style of geometric abstract visual art that Bill espoused.

3. Bill's overtly antagonistic attitude to Brazilian modern architecture during the postwar period has only begun to be addressed by scholars and the episode has been largely excluded from histories of art that uniformly celebrate Bill's role.

In the early 1950s, Swiss artist and designer Max Bill's visual art was widely celebrated in metropolitan artistic circles in Brazil.¹ This was largely due to the sculpture prize Bill was awarded at the inaugural Bienal de São Paulo in 1951 for his work *Tripartite Unity*, an event that has dominated the historiography of the period.² What is less discussed is the controversial speech he gave in the same city two years later, which resulted in a permanent rift between Brazilian architects and the Swiss artist.³ In 1953, Bill travelled to Brazil twice; the first time for this speaking engagement and the second time as a juror for the II Bienal de São Paulo.⁴ It was during his first trip, at the height of his status in the visual arts, that he delivered an inflammatory lecture decrying the direction that Brazilian architects had taken in recent projects, condemning it as 'utter anarchy in building, jungle growth in the worst sense'.⁵ Lúcio Costa, a leading Rio de Janeiro-based architect, shot back that Bill was claiming to know Brazilian architecture after spending only three days in the country.⁶ Their public quarrel is instructive not only because it affirms the pride and self-confidence that Costa and his cohort had in their own brand of modern architecture, but also because it demonstrates their refusal to cower to European critique, despite Bill's stature at the time.

Examining the inflammatory rhetoric from Bill's speech not only validates Costa's indignation, but also suggests how Brazilian modern architecture was received abroad in the early 1950s. At the outset of his talk, Bill announced that he would 'speak very frankly' and acknowledged that his words would 'be a criticism'. Firmly believing that 'future architects of Brazil' would benefit from his honesty, Bill rejected their application of modernist architectural principles, in particular free form planning, the all-glass wall, *brises-soleils*, and *pilotis* (piers or supports, such as

4. Bill served with a group of fourteen esteemed international critics and scholars including such figures as Jorge Romero Brest from Argentina, Herbert Read from England, and James Johnson Sweeney from the USA. There were also four Brazilians on the jury. They were art critic Sérgio Milliet, art critic Mário Pedrosa, artist Thomaz Santa Rosa and museum administrator Wolfgang Pfeiffer. The exhibition, held from December 1953 to February 1954, was significantly larger than the inaugural show in 1951 and was installed in two newly constructed buildings designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer in the new Parque Ibirapuera, a large urban park in São Paulo. More than 400 works represented Brazil. In addition to thirty-three national contributions, there were also several special galleries dedicated to such individual artists as Henry Moore and Mondrian. The gallery dedicated to Picasso's work was of particular interest because it included *Guernica*, a painting that had been travelling the world since its completion in 1937. Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo: Da Era do Museu à Era dos Curadores (1951–2001)*, Boitempo, São Paulo, 2004, p 55
5. 'Report on Brazil', *Architectural Review*, October 1954, p 238
6. Costa's comments lead me to believe that it was Bill's first trip to Brazil, despite his previous exhibitions in the country. Lúcio Costa, *Lúcio Costa: Registro de uma Vivência*, Empresa das Artes, São Paulo, 1995, pp 201–202
7. Bill is likely referring to opinions circulated by the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). This group, founded in Switzerland in 1928 by twenty-eight European architects, served as an organising body for architects and sponsors of international conferences. Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier is commonly considered the principal architect associated with the style, due to his prolific writing, as well as his leadership role in CIAM.
8. Although not specifically identified in the 'Report in Brazil', according to art historian Valerie Fraser, Bill is referring to Niemeyer's *Bienal* building. Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930–1960*, Verso, London and New York, 2000, p 254

columns, pillars or stilts that lift the building above ground or water). He contended that Brazilians were misusing these elements, which were fundamental to European modernist architecture, thus straying from the true 'duties of the architect in the service of man and society'.⁷ He proclaimed, 'Architecture in your country stands in danger of falling into a parlous state of anti-social academicism', which for Bill would have meant that their creations were totally divorced from the praxis of quotidian life. Throughout the lecture his attitude fluctuated between condescension and outright insult, taking a particularly indignant tone in a discussion of Oscar Niemeyer's unfinished Bienal building in São Paulo's Parque Ibirapuera.⁸ Bill declared:

In a street here in São Paulo I have seen under construction a building in which *piloti* construction is carried to extremes one would have supposed impossible. There I saw some shocking things, modern architecture sunk to the depths, a riot of anti-social waste, lacking any sense of responsibility towards either the business occupant or his customers. . . . What it illustrates to me is the utmost possible abuse of freedom of form and the most fantastic possible employment of *pilotis*. Here is utter anarchy in building, jungle growth in the worst sense.⁹

Bill, who maintained a strictly dogmatic and functionalist approach to architecture, strongly believed that the architect's primary purpose was to serve society's needs, and thus he could not tolerate what he considered to be aesthetic indulgences in Niemeyer's building.¹⁰ For the Swiss artist, the superfluous forms and elements in Niemeyer's curvaceous Bienal structure were antithetical to the presumed goals for modernist architecture as formulated by European practitioners. Such an 'abuse of freedom of form' was a harbinger for the unravelling of an orderly society. In Bill's view, architecture should be rational and sober; the critical opprobrium conveyed by such words as 'fantastic' or 'jungle growth', synonymous with the exotic, bizarre and unruly, would have been the worst insults he could devise.

Bill's 1953 lecture and his negative characterisation of Brazilian modern architecture reached a wide audience when a transcript appeared in print.¹¹ In October 1954 the British *Architectural Review* dedicated sixteen pages to a 'Report on Brazil', featuring five essays by such figures as the German architect Walter Gropius and his wife, Ise Frank, the young English architect Peter Craymer, the Japanese architect Hiroshi Ohye, the editor of Italian *Casabella* Ernesto Rogers, and Bill, along with photographs highlighting several of the latest building projects. All had recently visited Brazil for the second Bienal and wrote of their impressions, both positive and negative, regarding projects then under construction.¹² Gropius's text, for example, expressed a fundamental respect for the Brazilians' audacity in seeking radically to make over their architectural environment.¹³ However, despite all of the interest in Brazilian modern architecture, a distinctly condescending tone permeated many of the essays, particularly in the introduction to the Report written by the journal's editors:

To the European architect few creatures could appear as fabulous as his Brazilian counterpart as he appears in the stories which filter back from Rio – of men with Cadillacs, supercharged hydroplanes, collections of modern art to make the galleries blush, [and] bikini-clad receptionists. . .

9. 'Report on Brazil', op cit
10. Bill was also very dogmatic when it came to the execution of Concrete art.
11. Throughout the essay I have deliberately used the phrase 'Brazilian modern architecture', as opposed to 'modern architecture in Brazil'. Mário Pedrosa wrote about the distinction between the two phrases; the first connotes a local creation and the latter suggests the importation of a foreign idea. In Fernando Luiz Lara, *The Rise of Popular Modernist Architecture in Brazil*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2008, p 96
12. At the time that Bill made his speech in 1953, there was a lot of interest in Brazilian architecture among foreigners and many architects from abroad went to Brazil to see first-hand the new buildings being constructed there. This interest was the impetus behind visits by foreign architects dating back to the early 1930s. Frank Lloyd Wright, Eero Saarinen, Marcello Piacentini, Donat-Alfred Agache and Le Corbusier all went to Brazil during this period.
13. 'Report on Brazil', op cit, p 237
14. 'Brazil Builds' is a reference to an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York installed in 1943, discussed later in this essay. Its curators were Philip Goodwin and G E Kidder Smith. After 1937 and President Getúlio Vargas's imposition of the authoritarian Estado Novo (new State) following António Salazar in Portugal there was a drive toward cultural self-sufficiency and isolationism in Brazil. This may help to account for the importance given to the 'Brazil Builds' exhibition and publication since this access to Brazil by a foreigner would have been an unusual opportunity in the early 1940s. Few foreign intellectuals visited Brazil until after the end of the Vargas regime in 1945 and many of those who were there when Vargas instituted the Estado Novo in 1937 were forced to leave. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was professor of anthropology in São Paulo between 1935 and 1937, discusses the difficulties foreign intellectuals faced in Brazil after the initiation of Vargas's authoritarian regime. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, Atheneum, New York, 1974. 'Report on Brazil', op cit, p 235
15. It is ironic that what the *Architectural Review* editors are

Our trouble is the lack of authoritative eye-witnesses, for Brazil is a boom-province of the Modern Movement which the Movement's masters have hardly visited since Le Corbusier lent his authority and support to the pioneer efforts of Costa and Warchavchik in the thirties; and, since the definitive reports of Goodwin and Kidder-Smith in 'Brazil Builds', we have had to rely on photographs and inflated newspaper stories which seem to bear no relation to one another, nor to the situation as Philip Goodwin left it.¹⁴

This introduction managed to simultaneously exoticise and infantilise Brazilian architects while showcasing their innovations and achievements.¹⁵ And Bill's acerbic lecture was even more offensive. In fact, Bill's comments were so ungracious that Ise Frank took pains to distance herself from his position. She wrote:

The air was still full of Max Bill's accusations, which have made the rounds in South America. We did not think them quite justified, and Niemeyer can anyhow only be understood if one knows Rio. . . It is not justifiable to measure them [Brazilian architects] with a Swiss yardstick.¹⁶

Ernesto Rogers also responded directly to Bill's remarks, stating that the Swiss artist:

. . . was unable to appreciate the meaning of an art so different from his own, even in those cases where that foreign art was perfectly self-sufficient and coherent and produced works of undoubted value.¹⁷

Rogers was complimentary to the Brazilian group whose architectural works, he argued, should be respected for their cultural relevance, rather than condemned for their inability to conform to foreign values that have little bearing on conditions particular to Brazil.

The Report demonstrated the range of responses, from laudatory to contemptuous, that Brazilian architecture elicited abroad. Equally important, it underscored one of the polemics of modern architecture, namely whether or not its principles were open to interpretation in different cultures and climates, as Rogers and Frank posited, or whether it provided a set of rules to be adhered to consistently, as Bill argued. Brazil's modern architecture provided the ideal subject to ground these theoretical questions. These debates, far from detracting from the foreign interest in this 'boom-province of the Modern Movement', only drew more attention to an already present fascination with Brazilian architecture in the mid-century.

Brazilian architects such as Costa, Niemeyer and Affonso Reidy, among others, saw European modern architecture as a schema to be both absorbed and adapted to their tropical conditions, seeking to celebrate rather than conceal the differences that separated the Brazilian context from the European or North American ones. These Rio-based architects joined constituents of both local and foreign derivation – *palmeiras*, or palm trees, and pilotis – to create a national style of modern architecture. In the process of this synthesis, functionalist architectural components, such as the *brise-soleil* and the all-glass wall, were converted into signifiers of Brazilian modern architecture. In their innovative designs, these architects demonstrated that modernity and 'tropicality' were not mutually exclusive concepts, but could be brought together to create an expression particular to Brazil, signalling the region's cli-

after is a factual and credible account of the state of the field in Brazil, yet they begin their own report with an exaggerated description of 'bikini-clad receptionists'.

16. 'Report on Brazil', op cit, p 236

17. Ibid, p 239

18. The phrase 'tropical modernism' has reappeared in the literature on Brazilian architecture from the period. William Curtis deploys it to describe Le Corbusier's view of Brazilian modern architecture, placing it in quotation marks to signal that it is a constructed concept. See William J R Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, Phaidon, London, 1996, p 386. Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930–1945*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2001, pp 207–210. It was also the title of a chapter about Roberto Burle Marx in Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2001.

19. The desire to be simultaneously internationalist and nationalist registered in economic and political ideology as well. This attitude is fundamental to the principles of developmentalism, the belief that a nation could liberate itself from the trappings of underdevelopment and poverty through civic works, urbanisation, industrialisation and cultural initiatives, and was adopted by many sectors of Brazilian society in the 1950s.

20. The landfill takes its name from the neighbourhood of Flamengo, which sits adjacent to the reclaimed land. The city was demolishing hills in the centre of Rio de Janeiro and using the earth to expand the shoreline bordering the downtown area further into the Bay of Guanabara. By the end of the 1960s, the landfill would include Santos Dumont airport, MAM's extensive campus and the vast Parque do Flamengo (Flamengo Park). Although the landfill project became mired in city bureaucracy and was therefore constructed in several phases over the course of three decades, the origin of the idea evolved from a 1930 urban plan by French urbanist Donat-Alfred Agache, with the assistance of a young Affonso Reidy. Agache's plan was largely discarded due to the Revolution of 1930 and subsequent change in government just after the plan was announced. Norma Evenson, *Two Brazilian*

matic conditions as well as its urban histories. This article explores how Rio's modern architects created hybrid metaphors capable of referencing both Brazil and international modernism and then exploited these tropical modernisms to advertise the modernisation of Brazil to foreign and local audiences.¹⁸ While this promotion took place in a range of media, two cases emanating from Rio de Janeiro are highlighted here for their use of the print medium: the promotional materials produced by the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) and the architectural journal *Módulo*. Equally pertinent are the various ways in which foreigners and Brazilians alike manipulated terms referencing the tropical to further their distinct agendas. The interpretive category of the tropical thus signified differently to diverse audiences.

Despite the contentious reception of their regional interpretations, many cultural agents in Brazil considered modern architecture to be a uniquely compelling medium that could convey a multitude of messages simultaneously, including stylistic innovation and technological advancement. There was an interdisciplinary modernity where aesthetics met with engineering. For this reason, modern architecture became one of the most compelling and widely circulated, if controversial, symbols of industrial and cultural progress in Brazil.¹⁹

THE MUSEU DE ARTE MODERNA'S ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

In the 1950s, Rio de Janeiro's MAM quickly evolved from an idea into a concrete reality. Shortly after her appointment as director in 1951, Niomar Moniz Sodré lobbied the city for a permanent location for the private museum. In 1952, the civic government granted MAM a parcel of land on a massive landfill project known as the Aterro do Flamengo and Affonso Reidy,²⁰ the municipal architect, was appointed to design the campus.²¹ Reidy, also an urban planner, had a profound respect for Rio de Janeiro's topography and climate. Rather than fight the rugged, albeit beautiful, setting as so many others had already done, Reidy chose instead to let the natural topography guide his design strategy for MAM's entire complex.²² Yet, remarkably, when Reidy designed the museum in 1954, the land did not exist because the Aterro project was still under way; he had to devise a design sensitive to MAM's physical location without being able to set foot on it.²³ To these ends, Reidy's final plan for MAM is an excellent example of the careful blending together of references to international modern architecture and tropicality. The architect's embrace of the city's distinctive landscape registers in the design in multiple ways. For example, Reidy was adamant that the museum's specific location on the Aterro inform the plan. In describing his design, Reidy was resolute that the structures should not interfere with their surroundings or obstruct the view of the bay and the famous hills of Corcovado and Pão de Açúcar (Sugar Loaf Mountain), which could be seen in the distance.²⁴ The architect explained that horizontality governed his design for the entire campus – which consisted of three discrete buildings, the Bloco Escola (School Block), the Bloco Exposições (Exhibition Block), and the Bloco Teatro (Theatre Block) – so as not to disrupt the rhythm of the surrounding mountains.²⁵ He also integrated

Capitals: Architecture and Urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973, p 68

21. According to Carmen Portinho, Reidy's professional collaborator and personal companion, the Municipal Department of Popular Housing, where they both worked, focused all of its energy on the design and building of MAM in the following years. Affonso Eduardo Reidy et al, *Affonso Eduardo Reidy: Arquitectos Brasileiros = Brazilian Architects*, Editorial Blau and Instituto Lina Bo e PM Bardi, Lisbon and São Paulo, 2000, p 171
22. Francisco Bolonha, one of Reidy's apprentices in the Department of Popular Housing, reported that once a site was chosen for a project Reidy 'demanded a complete topographical study', which he used to orient his structures. For example, the curvilinear footprint of the principal buildings in the housing complexes at Pedregulho and Gávea follow the existing bedrock. Carmen Portinho confirmed this, stating, 'the main building's curves follow the hillsides curves'. *Ibid*, pp 17, 91
23. Speaking about the land where MAM was to be located, Carmen Portinho said, 'the plot, situated in the Guanabara Bay, near Santos Dumont Airport, was under water, having to be transformed in a landfill, which would begin with the leveling of Santo Antônio Hill and would extend to the edge of Flamengo beach...' Reidy et al, *op cit*, p 168
24. In a 1953 essay, Reidy described his intentions for MAM's design: 'If the correspondence between the architectural work and its physical surroundings is always a question of major importance, in the case of the building of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, this condition acquires an even greater relevance, given the site's privileged location: in the very heart of the city, in the middle of an extensive area that in the near future will be a beautiful public park, leaning over the sea, facing the sandbar and surrounded by the world's most beautiful landscape. It was the architect's constant concern to avoid as much as possible the building conflicting with nature and becoming a disturbing element in the landscape. Hence... the predominance of horizontal lines in opposition to the hill's silhouette, and the use of an extremely hollow and transparent structure, which will allow continuity of the gardens...

glass walls as frequently as possible in order to showcase the landscape from every angle.

Rio de Janeiro's strong sunlight was another principal concern. In 1955, Reidy wrote that the 'problems created by climate led to various solutions of protection against the sun, and the need for ventilated and shady places made construction on stilts ubiquitous'.²⁶ In fact, Reidy took a somewhat novel approach to this in his design for the Exhibition Block. The instantly identifiable hallmark of the building is the repeated use of V-shaped concrete ribs, which function as an external framing device.²⁷ Fourteen ribs along the two longest sides of the hall extend from the ground upward and outward, providing suspension and support for two storeys of galleries as well as the roof. Because these ribs bore so much weight, many of the walls, both interior and exterior, could be made of glass. Rather than implement brises-soleils to shield the interiors of the Exhibition Block from the sun's rays and heat, as he had done in some parts of the School Block, Reidy's V-shaped ribs project beyond the edges of the building. The roof, supported by these ribs, extends out past the building's perimeter to provide the lower floors with ample protection from the sun. Reidy's use of these ribs also made it possible for the ground floor to be left almost completely open. This large open space under the galleries was intended to function as a communal gathering place shielded from the sun, and it has served as a site for museum openings and events as well as for political demonstrations.

In addition to the three buildings, the overall design for the museum included several patios, terraces, reflecting pools and fountains as well as landscaped gardens, intended to integrate MAM's campus with the Parque do Flamengo. Reidy worked with Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx to incorporate the natural world into their man-made constructions. Burle Marx mixed autochthonous shrubs, grasses, flowers and trees into these outdoor spaces both to highlight such formal characteristics as their colour, shape, texture and size, and to merge MAM's physical setting with the surrounding park and bay.

Reidy and Burle Marx embraced the tropical surroundings in their designs and materials, but they also manipulated and controlled it. For example, Burle Marx created a remarkable wave-patterned lawn that conjoined MAM's gardens with the Parque.²⁸ Although formally very striking, this was actually a meticulously restrained gardening exercise that required the planting of seeds for two different grasses in a very precise pattern. The Aterro do Flamengo project is another example of the engineering of Rio's tropical landscape. Not only were hills levelled and mountains tunnelled in order to have enough raw earth for the landfill, but a thoroughly manufactured 'natural' landscape was intentionally constructed which included wooded areas, extensive lawns and a beach.²⁹ Although Burle Marx has been internationally lauded for his championing of Brazilian flora, many of his creations were so stylised that they bore little resemblance to natural conditions.³⁰

Rather than avoid the heated debates surrounding modernist architecture, MAM's administration deliberately took the institution into the maelstrom by foregrounding Brazilian modern architecture, both visually and textually, in the museum's public image campaign throughout the 1950s. Reidy's designs were publicly announced in 1954, a year after Bill's speech, coinciding with its publication in the *Architectural*



Flamengo Park (Museum of Modern Art), Rio de Janeiro, c 1960, photo: Marcel Gautherot/Archive of the Instituto Moreira Salles

an open solution was adopted, in which the surrounding nature would participate in the spectacle offered to the Museum's visitors.' *Ibid.*, p 164

25. MAM's mission was to offer the public a wide range of events: art exhibitions, film screenings, dance performances, public lectures and studio art classes, each requiring specialised spaces and reflected in Reidy's architectural plan for the campus.
26. *Ibid.*, p 25
27. This description relies on Klaus Franck's discussion of this building. Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Klaus Franck, *The Works of Affonso Eduardo Reidy*, Praeger, New York, 1960, pp 66–85.
28. Burle Marx employed this design in other media as well, the most famous being the sidewalks of Copacabana, which he

Review's 'Report on Brazil'. Capitalising on the fact that Brazilian modern architecture already had an international reputation, the building plans were privileged in travelling exhibitions, museum publications and fundraising materials, often in lieu of showing any visual art. As a consequence of their dissemination, MAM's architectural designs quickly became the graphic symbol of the museum, serving as visual shorthand for the institution's aspirations.

Nowhere is this emphasis on architecture both graphically and textually more apparent than in a large-scale brochure produced by the museum in the mid-1950s. Printed in a restricted colour palette of black, white and red, this stylised fifteen-page booklet reproduces three photomontages of the future site of MAM, a map of Rio de Janeiro and photographs of construction on the School Block. Reidy's architectural plans also appear in detail, in two ways: four pages of annotated floor plans as well as elevation drawings on large-scale tracing paper. Except for the booklet's title, *Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro*, all text contained within was printed exclusively in English, presumably for a US audience.³¹ Although not explicitly stated, the brochure was probably intended as part of a fundraising initiative in New York City

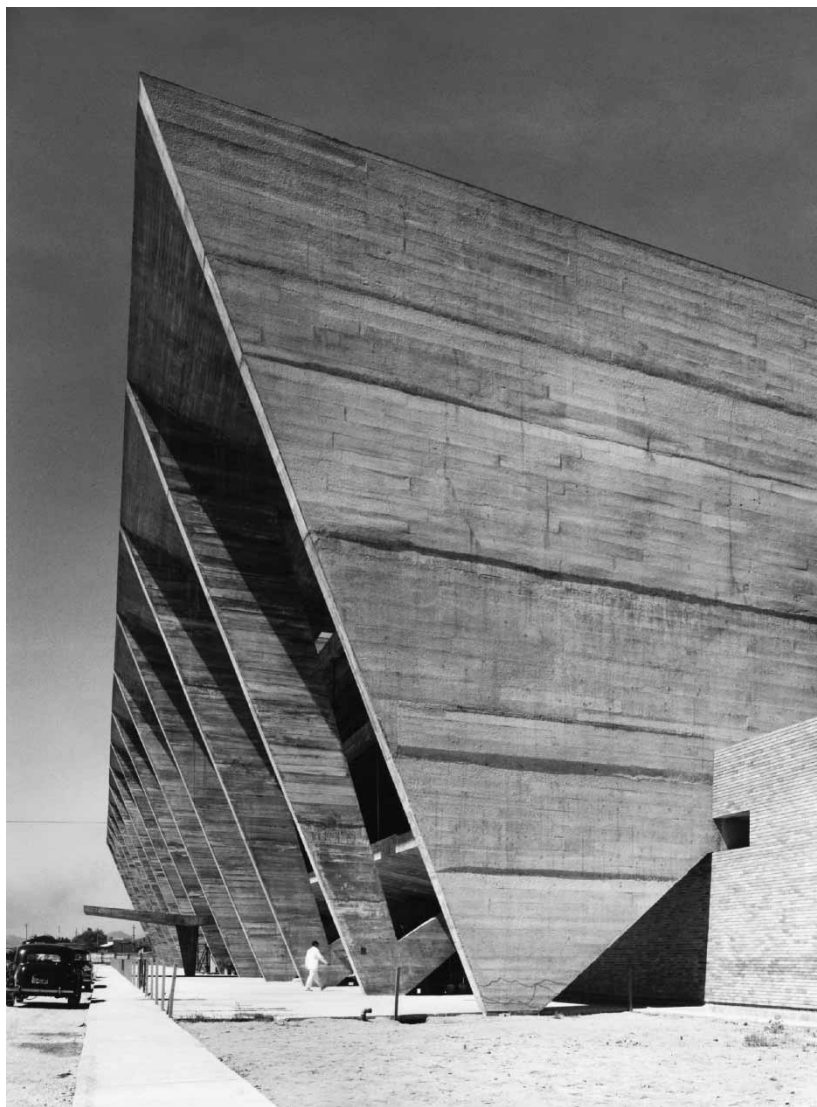
redesigned in the 1970s. It is said that this undulating pattern is taken from the plaza in front of the Manaus Opera House, in the Brazilian Amazon. Usually rendered in black-and-white tile, it is said to mimic the soil in parts of the Amazon River.

29. This same objective – mastering Brazil’s natural environment to make it more inhabitable – had been carried out in Rio de Janeiro for centuries. In fact, the city had a history of large-scale urban development. By the 1950s, there had already been significant changes to the city’s landscape and urban plan dating back to the nineteenth century with the Haussmanisation of the city and the widening of Avenida Central. Rio de Janeiro’s original topography consisted of a series of mountains, valleys and lakes, situated at the mouth of a large coastal bay – not an ideal setting for a densely populated metropolis. Over the course of several centuries this landscape was repeatedly modified; hills were razed, lakes were filled and mountains were tunnelled through to accommodate a growing population. The physical construction of MAM’s campus on reclaimed land was part of this civic tradition. Mauricio de A Abreu, *Evolução Urbana do Rio de Janeiro*, 4th edition, Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 2008

30. Stepan, op cit, p 236

31. There is no publication information on this booklet; however, textual clues indicate that it was published after construction of MAM got under way in early 1955, and for fundraising purposes, an opinion supported by the museum’s current archivist.

32. Nelson Rockefeller was a trustee at New York’s MoMA from 1932 to 1979. He served as Treasurer from 1935 to 1939 and as President from 1939 to 1941 and again from 1946 to 1953, precisely during the time that the museums of modern art in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were being established. In fact, he participated in the first meeting to discuss the founding of Rio’s MAM in 1946 at the house of Raymundo Castro Maya on a trip to Brazil. In addition to this, Rockefeller, who had many family investments in various regions of Latin America, wielded considerable political power in US foreign policy in Latin America due to his position with the Office of Inter-American Affairs.



Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, western façade of the Exhibition Block (Bloco Exposição), 1961, photo: Aertsens Michel/Arquivo Fotográfico/Pesquisa e Documentação/Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro

where Moniz Sodr e, with the help of then MoMA trustee Nelson Rockefeller, had established a group of supporters called The Friends of the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro in New York.³² The last three pages of the booklet deal with non-architectural subject matter, and the visual arts are mentioned only once in the entire publication. Under the heading ‘Permanent Collection’, painting, sculpture, drawing and tapestry are cited as the museum’s four principal areas of collecting. Yet more space is dedicated to listing the museum’s other activities, such as cinema, theatre, ballet, music, records, lectures, exhibitions, circulating exhibitions, courses, library and publications. The following page displays a graphically sophisticated diagram of the four-year curriculum of



Flamengo Park (Museum of Modern Art), Rio de Janeiro, c 1960 photo: Marcel Gautherot/Archive of the Instituto Moreira Salles

the Escola Técnica de Criação (Technical School of Creation), a design programme that was in the process of being established by MAM.³³ This diagram outlines the various course offerings and the different specialisations available to students in such fields as industrial design, visual communication and information studies. The last page of the booklet provides a list of the museum's board of directors and trustees. But it is the formal design of these last two facing pages that has the most visual impact: the page on the left was predominantly white with a red square in the centre, while the page on the right was predominantly red with a white square in its middle. The page compositions are mirror opposites and further unified by their use of the same black-and-white font.

33. Argentinian artist and designer Tomás Maldonado, who was working at the newly founded Ulm School with Swiss artist Max Bill, designed this institute. The Technical School of Creation was never actually started at MAM, but later opened as the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (Higher School of Industrial Design) in 1963. Pedro Luiz Pereira de Souza, *ESDI: Biografia De Uma Idéia*, Eduerj, Rio de Janeiro, 1996

The distinctly abstract design of the brochure, with its sober layout of black, white and red geometric shapes, would have conveyed a rigorous and organised mentality, ideally reflective of the administration of the museum. Even the brief texts that appear within reiterate these sentiments. In fact, the very first page of the booklet features the following statement:

The Museu de Arte Moderna de Rio de Janeiro needs space to this Special Campaign. It now looks to the United States. It could not do so until it had more than quality and quantity to present. The building is growing fast—and so are our needs.

On the strength of its service to education and culture, its continental reputation and goodwill, the Museu de Arte Moderna feels entitled to appeal to the generosity and understanding of Americans. American contributions will not only mean a welcome and useful help, but they will indicate the acceptance of the "Museu de Arte Moderna" as a center for continental culture. And this will mean that its efforts will not have been in vain.

Project architect: Alfonso Eduardo Reidy
General architect: Roberto Burle Marx

Total cost: **48,000 square meters (130,000 sq. ft.)**
Building: 36,000 square meters (98,000 sq. ft.)
 Area to be completed for opening: **12,000 square meters**
 on January 31, 1957. **22,000 square meters**
 Total cost of building: **\$5,500,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 Subscribed to date: **\$4,000,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 To be raised: **\$4,500,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 Museum membership: **6,732**

* Cost of first building: **\$2,500,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 Scheduled for opening on January 15, 1956


\$-hour studios and lecture rooms, workshops, classrooms, library, reading and exhibiting space, administrative rooms open for presentation of exhibitions, printing press, restaurant, laboratory, dark room, restaurant, bar, tennis, tennis, gardens, etc. (see plan)

Cost of second building: **\$1,500,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 Scheduled for 1958. Planning is already started (see plan)


Exhibition hall, film library, library, auditorium, administration offices, second library, observation, conference room, offices, restaurant, etc. (see plan)

Cost of third building: **\$2,500,000 (U.S.) dollars**
 Scheduled for 1960. Foundation is ready


Three (3) 1000 seats lecture gardens (see plan)




The roof tent in the Bay is prepared as part of the temporary operation.



Temporary site of the Exhibition Gallery and Administrative Offices on the ground floor of the Ministry of Education



THEORY OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION
 History of the Means of Information
 Practice of Information
 Cultural Interaction
 Introduction to the Visual Arts
 Representation Methods
 Cultural Interaction
 Industrial Design Theory
 Industrial Design Practice
 Theoretical Subjects optional
 Cultural Interaction 3rd and 4th year
 Automation



THEORY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION
 History of the Means of Visual Communication
 Practice of Visual Communication
 Cultural Interaction 3rd and 4th year
 Workshop Practice
 Cultural Interaction
 Industrial Design Theory
 Industrial Design Practice
 Theoretical Subjects optional
 Cultural Interaction 3rd and 4th year
 Automation

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2nd Vice-President	Alcides de Sales
Executive Director	Nelson Maria Sobal
Asst. Executive	Carman Paranhos
Secretary	Henrique S. Modlin
Treasurer	Nelson Faria Bastião

TRUSTEES			
Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo
Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo
Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo
Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo	Alfredo Augusto de Azevedo

Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, pp 4-5 (above) and pp 13-14 (below) of a brochure published by the museum and Davis, Delaney, Inc, New York, 1957, 16 x 20 inches, courtesy Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação/Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, photos: Aleca Le Blanc

This brochure sketches the story of an enterprise which, though familiar enough to readers in the United States, is very uncommon in South America: individual initiative in the service of the public good.

The text that follows emphasises that the museum's 'final aim is to help spread the desire for a progressive, sensible and modern pattern of living'. In the view of MAM's administrators, Reidy's architectural plan embodied all of these principles, which helps explain why his design came to be the visual symbol of the museum. In addition to quantifiable fundraising goals, the brochure was designed to communicate larger concepts about MAM, and, in turn, the country of Brazil to a foreign audience. While the emphasis on architecture, education and industrial design was calculated to represent Brazil as modern and industrialised to New York investors and philanthropists, the publication's very form was also integral to the message.

MAM's decision to forego the use of visual art to brand the museum was also very probably due in part to the fact that no single artwork could represent the breadth of media supported by the institution, from painting, sculpture and engraving, to glass works, jewellery, tapestries and cinema.³⁴ Only architecture, understood in terms of Gropius's early Bauhaus theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, could hope to represent the sum total of MAM's mission and activities. Moreover, MAM was invoking a European tradition that was well known throughout the Western world. By the 1950s, the Bauhaus and references to its structure had become internationally recognised signs for modernity and technological innovation.³⁵ By cannily referring to the Bauhaus, even by implication, MAM was able to entwine Brazilian cultural initiatives with the history and tradition of international modernisms.

BRAZILIAN MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN PRINT

When MAM began promoting the plans for its new campus in the early 1950s, the museum was conforming to a well-established Brazilian tradition. For at least the previous two decades, Brazilian architects and publishers had actively exploited architectural plans and photographs of modern buildings to manipulate their image abroad. Moreover, the international community of architects had demonstrated a fascination with Brazilian architecture, and journals throughout Europe and the USA dedicated many pages to the subject in the 1940s and 1950s. According to architectural historian Fernando Lara, 'more than one hundred articles about Brazilian architecture were published outside Brazil between 1947 and 1949'.³⁶ The use of architecture to demonstrate Brazilian tropical modernism, by Brazilians and foreigners alike, was not a new phenomenon.

One of the earliest and most prominent examples of this was the circulation of images and plans for the Ministry of Education and Health Building. In 1936, the young and relatively inexperienced architect Lúcio Costa was selected by Minister of Education and Health Gustavo Capanema to oversee the design of the new Ministry building in Rio de Janeiro. Costa assembled a team of like-minded young Brazilian architects to assist him, among them Niemeyer and Reidy.³⁷ Costa also

34. One possible reason for MAM avoiding the use of visual art to represent the institution involves stylistic changes that were taking place in Rio de Janeiro at the time. Heroic images of the Brazilian proletariat, typical of work by Cândido Portinari in the 1930s and 1940s, were jettisoned in the 1950s in favour of geometric abstraction. Art critic Mário Pedrosa vehemently supported those artists working in the style of Concrete art for its supposed international legibility and relevance, making its exclusion from MAM's marketing materials all the more surprising.

35. For example, Alfred Barr famously modelled MoMA on Gropius's Bauhaus after visiting Dessau.

36. This is according to his search of the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals database and originally published in his article of 2000. This international interest in Brazil continued well into the 1950s and only slowed in the 1960s, after the building of Brasília, considered by many to be the apogee of the modernist movement in Brazil. Lara points out that between 1962 and 1964 the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals cites only twenty-one articles about Brazilian architecture, a steep decline from the more than 100 articles published in the late 1940s. The reasons for the decline of interest in Brazilian modern architecture are not totally clear, but presumably have to do with the slowdown in building during the military dictatorship that came into power in 1964. Fernando Luiz Lara, 'Espelho de Fora: Arquitetura Brasileira Vista do Exterior', *Arquitextos* 004, 2000; and *The Rise of Popular Modernist Architecture in Brazil*, op cit, p 5

37. Carlos Azevedo Leão, Jorge Moreira and Ernâni Vasconcelos were also included on this team of professionals. This generation of Brazilian architects coalesced largely around Lúcio Costa. Costa, who briefly ran the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (National School of Fine Art) in 1930 and was ousted by traditionalists for what were perceived to be radical ideas, was slightly older than most of the others and benefited from a close political alliance with Capanema.

38. Le Corbusier visited Brazil in 1929 and lectured in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. However, I am not convinced he had a significant impact on Brazilian architects on that trip. He did meet Gregori Warchavchik who was working with modern idioms and became the Brazilian member to CIAM in 1930. Le Corbusier's return in 1936 had much more impact. It was only after the founding of CIAM in 1928 and his prolific publications in the 1930s that architects in Brazil really became familiar with his ideas.
39. This was emphasised by Maria Elisa Costa in a personal conversation, July 2006.
40. According to Lauro Cavalcanti the reception of the building in Europe was delayed due to the war. Lauro Cavalcanti, *When Brazil Was Modern: Guide to Architecture, 1928–1960*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2003, p 419
41. Mario Barata, *Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, 1952
42. The catalogue was very popular, written in Portuguese and English, and had at least three printings. A smaller version of this show also travelled to Brazil and was installed in ten cities there. In 1955, MoMA revisited this subject with the exhibition and catalogue *Latin American Architecture since 1945*. Philip Lippincott Goodwin and G E Kidder Smith, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1943. Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Latin American Architecture since 1945*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955. Zilah Quezado Deckker, *Brazil Built: The Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil*, Spon, London and New York, 2001, pp 223–226
43. This description has been culled from several sources, including a limited number of published descriptions, approximately five photographs and the building design plans. Because it was a temporary structure, it has not been as prominently featured in architectural books as other buildings. Some sources consulted include: Lúcio Costa archives, Quezado Deckker, op cit, Williams, and Goodwin and Smith, op cit.
44. Unfortunately, information identifying the landscape architect is not available. Although it resembles the work of Roberto Burle Marx, a frequent collaborator of Costa and

solicited advice from Le Corbusier. The Swiss architect visited Rio de Janeiro the same year and redesigned Costa's initial sketches.³⁸ Although the Brazilian team ultimately modified Le Corbusier's proposal, they kept his fundamental design intact as well as many of its key elements, such as the pilotis and brise-soleil louvres.³⁹ The resulting building was Rio de Janeiro's first rectangular modernist skyscraper.

The Ministry building received significant attention from both the local and the foreign press. Upon its completion in 1943, it was praised in the *New York Times* and the *New York Sun*. In 1947, it was featured in an eight-page article in the French journal *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*.⁴⁰ Even a decade later it continued to garner attention, especially when it served as MAM's temporary headquarters from 1952 to 1958. So intertwined was the Ministry building with the image of modernity that MAM continually emphasised its affiliation with this modernist with the image of modernity structure. In 1952, a cropped photograph of the edifice served as the cover image for one of the museum's earliest publications.⁴¹ An oft-repeated reference in museum literature poetically described the institution's provisional headquarters as 'set among the famous columns of the Ministry of Education and Health', thereby specifically alluding to the building's Corbusian pilotis.

'Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old 1642–1942', an exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1943, prominently featured the unfinished Ministry building. This presentation of the history of architecture in Brazil travelled to thirty-five cities in the Americas and was largely responsible for making Brazilian architecture widely known throughout the hemisphere.⁴² Curators Philip L Goodwin and G E Kidder Smith attributed their discovery of Brazilian architecture to the wildly popular Brazilian pavilion for the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. Designed by Costa and Niemeyer, the pavilion drew on many of the same tenets of modern architecture that were utilised at the Ministry building: a white structure was constructed of reinforced concrete and pilotis and plate glass walls were liberally deployed throughout both floors.⁴³ The upper storey of the pavilion was protected from the sun by brise-soleil louvres, in the same way that the entire northern façade of the Ministry made use of this shading device. The lush grounds surrounding the pavilion featured many of the exotic flora and fauna indigenous to Brazil – a lily-pond with storks, a snake pit, an aquarium, an orchid house and an aviary were all integrated into the layout.⁴⁴ At the Ministry, landscape architect Burle Marx filled terraces on the second floor and the roof as well as planters encircling the building with a variety of native plant offerings. These buildings and their landscaped surroundings combined what were presumed to be the universal forms of modernist architecture with indigenous vegetation – again, pilotis and palm trees – in order to represent Brazil as both modern and tropical, proving that, despite Bill's later characterisation in 1953, these terms were not mutually exclusive but could be made to coalesce.

Architectural advances taking place in Brazil were circulated primarily through domestically produced publications and exhibitions. In 1955, Niemeyer's architectural studio began publishing the newly created journal, *Módulo: Revista de arquitetura e artes visuais no Brasil (Module: Review of Architecture and Visual Arts in Brazil)*.⁴⁵ Issues featured plans, drawings, photographs and technical details of

Niemeyer, according to Niemeyer, Burle Marx did not participate. Oscar Niemeyer, interview with the author, 2 August 2006, Rio de Janeiro.

45. *Módulo* was released quarterly and published continuously until 1965, when it was closed down by members of the military dictatorship for its presumed opposition to the government. It returned to circulation in 1975, when censorship laws began to relax, and ceased publication in 1989.

46. Lara, *The Rise of Popular Modernist Architecture in Brazil*, op cit, p 92

47. *Módulo* 19, August 1960, p 52

48. From 1957 on, an extraordinary amount of space in each issue was dedicated to the monumental project of building the new national capital of Brasília, of which Niemeyer was the architect. Almost an entire issue of *Módulo* was devoted to presenting each of the entries in the competition for the creation of the urban plan of the new city as well as all of the judges' responses, allowing the entire process to be transparent to the public in Brazil and beyond. After Lúcio Costa's pilot plan was selected, additional photo spreads were dedicated to expeditions by the group overseeing the development of the land to visit the site of the new city, which was to be located on a completely undeveloped plateau in the interior part of the country. Later articles reported on construction as it got under way in Brasília and several pages were dedicated to the city's inauguration in April of 1960.

49. The exhibition was organised by Carmen Portinho who, although she officially worked for Rio de Janeiro's Department of Public Housing with Reidy, was also named MAM's Adjunct Executive Director (Director Executivo-Adjunto) and was Moniz Sodré's second-in-command at the museum for many years. She would later collaborate with Reidy in the building of the museum's campus. Because of her municipal position, she worked with many of the prominent modern architects. In 1932, she launched the architectural journal *Revista da Diretoria de Engenharia da Prefeitura do Distrito Federal*, an organ for sharing news about important architectural projects then in progress in Brazil. Through these two roles, as well as her own formal education in engineering up to 1925 – only the third woman to earn the degree in Brazil's history – she became an

many of the architectural projects then under way in Brazil, geared toward a readership of professionals in the field.⁴⁶ *Módulo*'s editors had a very specific objective in mind for this magazine: to convince an international audience of specialists that Brazilian architecture was innovative, both stylistically and technologically. Indeed, in a concerted effort to reach beyond Portuguese-speaking audiences and participate in international discourse, *Módulo* was routinely translated into three languages – from Portuguese to English, French and German. This very deliberate editorial decision made *Módulo* accessible to a transnational readership, targeting the languages of the industrially developed world. So effective was this propagandistic medium believed to be that, in August 1960, Brazilian airline Panair do Brasil made *Módulo* available on all of its international flights.⁴⁷ The intersection of Brazilian modern architecture, engineering and air travel in the pages of this magazine made *Módulo* the ideal vehicle with which to market Brazilian tropical modernism to the world.⁴⁸

Módulo also featured articles about the visual arts, urbanism, design and culture. The opening of MAM in 1958, the international conference of art critics held in Brazil in 1959, and the founding of the Escola Superior do Desenho Industrial (ESDI or the College of Higher Education in Design) in 1963 all received extensive coverage in *Módulo*'s pages. In February 1959, *Módulo* reported on the circulation of MAM's exhibition 'Exposição de Arquitetura Contemporânea Brasileira' (Exhibition of Contemporary Brazilian Architecture).⁴⁹ Shown first in MAM's galleries at the Ministry of Education and Health building in 1952, it then travelled to several venues in Europe and North America, highlighting recent accomplishments in Brazilian architecture. Quite remarkably, the exhibition circulated almost continuously for the rest of the 1950s and, according to *Módulo*, in 1959 four versions were simultaneously touring Europe, North America, South America and Tokyo.⁵⁰ Summarising the overarching thesis of the shows, the article stated:

Architecture is not just an art to which Brazil has made widely respected contributions; in which Brazil stands on a level with the most advanced countries; and in which Brazil provides entirely original motifs, of outstanding beauty of line. It also bears witness to Brazilian technical and organizational ability and potential for collective action in large-scale enterprises. Besides this, it is evidence of our way of life, and an expression of man's development in tropical surroundings. It is perhaps the most genuine expression of the emergence of a new civilization in the tropics.

Although the promotional rhetoric of this description is impossible to ignore, the exhibition did achieve the objective of portraying Brazil as a modern industrialised nation no longer tied to its agrarian past. Brazilian architects, museums and publishers were prepared to defend their modern architecture, as Costa did in the face of Bill's condemnation, and the ways in which it was enhanced by its tropical context and character.⁵¹ Rather than acquiesce to negative associations, they emphasised and celebrated their tropical identity both rhetorically and formally.

This spirited defence reached a crescendo with the building of Brasília, the most widely publicised undertaking in the field of Brazilian modern architecture. In fact, the same 1959 *Módulo* article quoted above goes

integral member of the group of modernist architects then working in Brazil. This biographical information is taken from Ana Luiza Nobre, *Carmen Portinho: O Moderno em Construção, Perfis do Rio series*, Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro, 1999.

50. 'The cultural division of the *Itamarati* has four traveling exhibitions of Brazilian architecture in operation abroad at the moment. The first is on the way to Vienna, after showings in Muenich [sic], Stuttgart, Zuerich [sic] and Geneva. This one was originally [sic] set up by Mary Vieira, in 1957, for the Berlin Interbau.' 'Exposições de Arquitetura Brasileira', *Módulo* 12, no February 1959, pp 38–43
51. In 1956, a year after *Módulo* was founded, Brazilian architect Henrique Mindlin published the 300-page book *Modern Architecture in Brazil* conceived as an updated version of the 'Brazil Builds' exhibition catalogue and intended as a comprehensive master narrative of Brazilian modern architecture for international consumption. Mindlin's volume located the beginning of modern architecture in Brazil with the design and construction of the Ministry of Education and Health building in Rio de Janeiro between 1936 and 1943. He left the end of the narrative open-ended, devoting only five pages to display many of the unfinished projects then under way, including a photograph of the maquette of the MAM campus then still in its infancy, and interestingly features the unfinished projects at the start of the book. French, German and English editions were published concurrently and distributed around the world by six different publishing companies. *Modern Architecture in Brazil* was not published in Portuguese until 2000 and therefore would have been accessible only to Brazilians with elite educations. Mindlin was not simply making arbitrary selections of works that would be interesting to North Atlantic audiences, as had been the case in the 'Brazil Builds' exhibition and *The Architectural Review's* 'Report on Brazil'. He was a practising Brazilian architect presenting a vision of his own field for foreign consumption. Swiss architect and Harvard professor Siegfried Giedion's one-page introduction to the volume did lend a certain international authority to the endeavour. Giedion writes that, 'Brazilian architecture is spreading like a tropical plant', and that 'there is something

on to address the use of Brasília's architecture in dismantling negative stereotypes related to Brazil's tropical condition.

Brasília has had a sensational effect on public opinion in Europe, the USA and our South American neighbors. . . Just imagine this country which, in their ill informed minds, they till recently thought of as a vast virgin forest, populated by poisonous snakes and naked Indians, this country that many thought was sunk in the lackadaisical inertia of the tropics, builds a capital city in but three years right in the heart of the jungle, raising delicate concrete structures where the crocodile and the leopard used to roam; this nation hurls its mighty tractors through that densest virgin forest in the world, to carve out gigantic highways; in short, this nation provides western civilization with a foretaste of the renewal of its ancient culture on a more beautiful and more human foundation!⁵²

Here the editors specifically acknowledge the preconceptions harboured by many foreigners of Brazil as a wild and dangerous land, and counter with visual metaphors of industrial machinery taming profuse nature. This rhetoric makes abundantly clear one of the principal objectives of the many elaborate building programmes undertaken during this period, as well as their promulgation – Brazilian architects and critics were intentionally trying to reshape the idea of Brazil as an unruly nation, a notion that was continually perpetuated in the press. Although Bill's reference to Brazil as a place of 'utter anarchy' and 'jungle growth' may be an egregious example of this essentialism, even adulatory texts were rife with similarly condescending characterisations. For example, Gropius's essay in the 'Report on Brazil', although fundamentally complimentary, describes Brazil as 'a wild country of a chaotic, almost explosive, development', and goes on to say that 'everything is done in a haphazard way by doubtful politicians'.⁵³

Despite the fact that numerous specialists in Europe and the USA met the rapid growth of the field of Brazilian modern architecture with some ambivalence, many were repeatedly drawn to the subject. No matter whether critics endorsed or disapproved of what was transpiring, Brazilian modern architecture occupied a significant place in international discourse. Architects such as Niemeyer and Reidy, as well as cultural agents in the local museum and publishing spheres, clearly understood this fascination and knowingly exploited it. In this light, MAM's reliance on architectural plans and photographs of the maquette in the marketing of the institution emerged as consistent with an already established tradition of promoting Brazil abroad. Though Brazilian critics also invoked rhetorical terms relating to tropicality to describe their country, as evidenced by the foregoing excerpts taken from *Módulo*, they marshalled them to prove that they had converted the untamed jungle into a domesticated tropical paradise. Burle Marx's gardens would seem to substantiate this. Yet, through these tactics, they also participated in the exoticisation of their own country, utilising the rhetoric when they found it advantageous to do so and condemning it when they did not.

It is curious then that the tropical became fundamental in the self-definition of Brazilian modern architecture as nationally specific, since, when applied by foreign critics, the term was generally disparaging. As mentioned earlier, Bill and the editors of *The Architectural Review* invoked

irrational in the rise of Brazilian architecture'. His text is by and large supportive and admiring but, like Bill, Giedion relies on tropical metaphors to describe Brazilian architecture. Henrique E Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil*, Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York, 1956

52. 'Exposições de Arquitetura Brasileira', op cit, pp 38–43
53. 'Report on Brazil', op cit, p 237
54. Another example of the use of the term 'tropical' as a criticism came in a particularly biting 1944 review, by US art critic Clement Greenberg. In it he called the work of Brazilian sculptor Maria Martins 'baroque, not modern, and given to Latin colonial décor and tropical luxuriance'. According to Greenberg's assessment, Martins's aesthetic was retrograde and excessive, two characteristics that he could not reconcile with modernism. To dub the work Baroque called to mind seventeenth-century art and architecture characterised by overindulgent decoration; from a modernist perspective, it was the equivalent of calling it 'bad art'. Greenberg's affinity for creating irreconcilable categories can be traced back to 1939 when he wrote his seminal essay, 'Avant-garde and Kitsch'. Clement Greenberg, 'Review of a Group Exhibition at the Art of This Century Gallery, and of Maria Martins and Luis Quintanilha', in John O'Brian, ed, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p 210. Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in Francis Frascina, ed, *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, Harper and Row, New York, 1985

the tropical when critiquing Brazilian architecture.⁵⁴ Despite this negative historiography, this dichotomy in terminology did not exist for the likes of Costa, Niemeyer and Reidy. For them, the term 'tropical modernism' was not an oxymoron, but rather the ideal paradigm they strove to achieve. Brazilian architects created a meaningful new visual language, taking into consideration the principles of Corbusian modernist architecture and the historical and environmental legacies of their tropical nation. This was not a derivative architecture, but rather a wholly original, historically and regionally specific articulation of modernism.