

Maison Brésilienne – Brazilian design from the 1950s until Today

Organization : Leticia Maciel

Exhibition from March 13th until April 30th 2013 (Opening reception on March 12th at 6pm)

Open Monday through Friday, from 11a.m. to 5 p.m., or by appointment.

The film « Sobras em Obras », about Geraldo de Barros and directed by Michel Favre, will be exhibited on March 20th, at 6.30 p.m.

This new exhibition, held by espace_L in collaboration with 20th Century R New York, presents the work of the renowned Brazilian artists: Geraldo de Barros, Oscar Niemeyer and Sergio Rodrigues, and the Portuguese artist Joaquim Tenreiro.

In 1950s, some Brazilian artists shared the same principles of two European artistic movements. At first, the Bauhaus, which revolutionized the design of the 20th century, and secondly, the Concrete Art. Max Bill (1908-1994), a prominent representative of this movement, and previously a Bauhaus director, received the first prize in sculpture at the first São Paulo Biennial, in 1951.

Thus begins a tradition on Brazilian design. The furniture from the 1950s is popular nowadays and it is highly sought after by collectors, besides being copied and it is mainly characterized by the absence of decorative motives and it emphasizes volume, shape and function. Indeed, the design of such objects follows the leading that "less is more", an expression by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), another Bauhaus director, to characterize the minimalist design.

The Brazilian furniture of this period is emphasized by the beauty and rarity of the Brazilian hardwoods (jacaranda, peroba and frejo), and secondly by the design itself. The combination of the concepts of bare and sensual furniture gives these powerful elegance is in perfect harmony with the Brazilian architecture, as mentioned by the Brazilian architect Jorge Hue:

"The concept of shelter has always been with us. It is lost in the night of the past, beyond the Neolithic period. Shelter, burrow, a safe place, individual or collective, temporary or permanent. Throughout this adventure, this idea has long changed, until we get home! It is within us, however, almost intact, the basic concept of home-burrow, a place of arrival. The joy of meeting our intimacy, our way of being.

Living with charm: the practise of this freedom with creativity. The clear and neat function of each thing, almost with that sense of joy we experience during breakfast.

Being at ease with comfort and the proper measure of our body, with the adequate choice of materials and the simplicity of a good living.

Our space is always smaller, but it is up to ourselves to understand it better. We must absorb the most from its interior, and promote high flexibility, interchangeability and function."¹

¹ Jorge Hue, in *Jorge Hue* - 2 vols, 1st edition, Editora Contracapa, 2010.



Geraldo de Barros

Born in Xavante, in the State of São Paulo, Geraldo de Barros (1923 - 1998) played a major role in the Brazilian art scene. As a craftsman, printmaker, painter, photographer and graphic designer, he contributed specially to the introduction of new and revolutionary ideas in the Brazil. During his stay abroad, mainly in France, Switzerland and Germany, Barros not only had the opportunity to meet important artists such as Max Bill, Henri Cartier-Bresson, François Morellet and Giorgio Morandi but he also attended the Bauhaus school, in Ulm. Upon his return to Brazil, he participated with his innovative ideas on various local movements, establishing a new approach to art, such as the Bauhaus ideas regarding the status and role of the artist in society. In 1954 he founded a unique working community in that region, called Unilabor, that later gave birth to a furniture company called Hobjeto. Partly due to the furniture Hobjeto developed, it has completely changed the concept of *habitat* in Brazil. Today, the originality of his approach is highly recognized abroad and his works are part of several prestigious public and private collections.



Oscar Niemeyer

Oscar Niemeyer was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in December 1907. He graduated from the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro in 1934. Upon graduation, Oscar Niemeyer joined a team of Brazilian architects collaborating with Le Corbusier on a new Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro, and worked until 1938 on this project. Le Corbusier's influence is present in Niemeyer's early work. The architect gradually acquired his own style, though. Niemeyer's architecture now serves as the singular visual reference for Brazilian modernism worldwide, with the most iconic example being his full-scale design of the capital city, Brasilia. The forms of his furniture echoes those that made his architecture symbolic of Brazilian style and Culture - the exceptional local craftsmanship, the sweeping organic curves that emerge from the earth, and the use of rich native materials - leather and Brazilian hardwoods. Recognized as one of the first to develop new concepts in architecture in this hemisphere, his designs are artistic gestures, with underlying logic and substance. "I have always", says Oscar Niemeyer, "accepted and respected all other schools of architecture, from the chill and elementary structures of Mies van der Rohe to the imagination and delirium of Gaudi. I must design what pleases me in a way that is naturally linked to my roots and the country of my origin."



Sérgio Rodrigues

Born into a family of prominent Brazilian artists and intellectuals in Rio de Janeiro, Sergio Rodrigues (b. 1927) took the passion for art and culture that surrounded him and shaped it into a career as one of Brazil's most influential designers. The roots of Rodrigues' work lie in his use of traditional raw materials such as jacaranda, peroba and imbuia to create icons of Brazilian taste, value and identity. After graduating in 1952 from the Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura, he opened Moveis Artesanal Paranaense, the first modern art and furniture store in Curitiba, in a partnership with the Hauner brothers (Italian designers). In 1955, Rodrigues founded Oca, one of the most important enterprises for the development of modern furniture in Brazil. He left the company in 1968 and since then has been working in his studio developing furniture lines for industrial production, architecture projects, and hotel, residential and office environments, as well as systems of pre-fabricated homes. Rodrigues made his mark on the international scene as the creator of the "Poltrona Mole" (1957), winning the 1st prize at the International Furniture Competition in Italy where it was lauded for being unmistakably Brazilian in material, scale and attitude. His designs appear as ambassadors of Brazilian design in architectural projects worldwide such as the Brazilian Embassy in Rome as well as many interiors of Oscar Niemeyer's buildings in Brasilia.



Joaquim Tenreiro

Joaquim Tenreiro (1906-1992) is the pioneer of modernist Brazilian furniture making. A forerunner in the use of rediscovered raw materials as well as the creator of a new formal language in the 20th century Brazilian furniture design, he drew on the lessons of past furniture making as a vital source, not only in the mastery of technical and constructive solutions, but also in the aesthetic experience, craftsmanship, and the cultural meaning of his production. His exquisitely crafted pieces evoke a refined coexistence of traditional values and modern aesthetics, strongly bound to the Brazilian cultural milieu. Born in Portugal in a family with great tradition in furniture making, he moved to Brazil in 1928 at the age of 22. He embarked on a career as a designer by working at various furniture manufacturers such as Leandro Martins, Francisco Gomes and Laubisch & Hirth which catered to wealthy Brazilian families eager to buy furniture with a conservative design that imitated traditional European styles. Tenreiro's vast experience in arts and crafts as well as furniture design was naturally contrary to such bourgeois expectations. Explicitly reacting against what he perceived as provincialism of a colonized society, Tenreiro proposed a contemporary language and advocated the idea that Brazilian furniture should be "formally light...A lightness which has nothing to do with weight itself, but with graciousness, and the functionality of spaces." In the early 1940s, Tenreiro founded his own furniture studio, Langenbach & Tenreiro Ltda, where his work began to gain more recognition. However, it was not until the 1950s that he began to be recognized as a master furniture designer in Brazil. His design philosophy found a great response with architects who supported modernism. Tenreiro's best client was Oscar Niemeyer. He designed furniture for his houses and completely broke away the virtuosity of antique styles. He developed a language adapted to the country's heat, using Brazilian hardwoods in abundance. In spite of his success and his professional recognition, Tenreiro closed his furniture studio in 1967 and decided to devote himself exclusively to fine arts, taking up once again a path that he had discontinued long before. During the next following decades until his death in 1992, his works were included in many art and design exhibitions held at renowned galleries and museums in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. A forerunner in the true sense of the word, the "father" of modern furniture in Brazil left behind an unrivaled aesthetic legacy.