PUBLIC SPACE AND THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT

São Paulo Modernist Case Study Briefing
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MUSEU DE ARTE DE SÃO PAULO (MASP)
PROJECT INFORMATION

Case study     Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP).  Address
Location:     Avenida Paulista, 1578, Bela Vista, São Paulo, SP


Architect: Lina Bo Bardi
Engineer: Engineer José Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz
Chief contractor: Antônio Luiz Canova.
Contractor: Sociedade Construtora Heleno e Fonseca S.A.
Client: Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello (Director of MASP) and City of São Paulo
Finance: City of São Paulo: Adhemar de Barros (Mayor)
Area: Public space: approx. 5.000m²  Built: approx. 10.000 m²
1. BUILDING CHRONOLOGY

1957  Demolition of the old Trianon, on Paulista Ave, the MASP site. Presentation of the first proposal to Mayor Adhemar de Barros.

1960  The architect Lina Bo Bardi commissioned to design MASP on the site of the former Trianon.

1962  Construction interrupted.

1966  Construction resumed.

1967  Casings and roof waterproofing.

1968  Opening of the exhibition hall in the presence of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.

1969  MASP declared a national heritage site by the Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Institute for Historic and Artistic Heritage) – IPHAN. Underground rooms are opened and the outdoor areas are landscaped.

1989  Building renovation.

1990  Reinforced concrete piers and beams are painted red, in accordance with original design.

1997  Permanent collection exhibition hall is subdivided. Bo Bardi’s display scheme is changed, with the removal of the concrete blocks and glass panels.

2003  Acquisition of a building facing the side façade of MASP for expansion of museum. Project not approved by city preservation agency (CONPRESP).

2007  New expansion proposal approved by CONPRESP.

2. PRODUCTION

2a) Client/Architect Relationship

The relationship between the Director of MASP, Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello, and the architect Lina Bo Bardi started through Lina’s husband, the Italian art collector, art critic and journalist Pietro Maria Bardi. Assis Chateaubriand owned the Diários e Emissoras Associados, the largest communication network at the time, from 1930 to 1960, which included newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, and a news agency. Chateaubriand had taken an active interest in modern artists since the 1920s, and published studies of Tarsila do Amaral, Lasar Segall, and the Italian futurist writer Filippo Marinetti, whom he accompanied during Marinetti’s trip to Brazil. In 1929, one of his newspapers, the Diário de S. Paulo, published the Revista de Antropofagia - Segunda Dentição [Anthropophagy Magazine], to which important writers and artists contributed: Geraldo Ferraz; Oswald Andrade; Raul Bopp; Oswaldo Costa; Tarsila do Amaral and Patrícia Galvão, also known as Pagu. In the 1930s, others were added: Ismael Nery,
Candido Portinari, Aldo Bonadei, Anita Malfatti, and Di Cavalcanti. This deep interest in modern art led to Chateaubriand’s desire to create an art museum in the city of São Paulo, and in 1946, he invited Pietro Maria Bardi to run it.

Chateaubriand’s initial Idea, inspired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, had been a modern art collection, but Bardi convinced him to include art of many periods and movements, though to be exhibited in ‘a modern way. Bardi acquired such a collection, taking advantage of the post-war European situation with its large supply of works of art. At first, in 1947, the museum occupied two floors of Chateaubriand’s Diários Associados Building, on Sete de Abril Street, with interiors designed by architect Lina Bo Bardi and Giancarlo Palanti.

In the mid-1950s, with the museum’s position consolidated and the expansion of the art collection, the construction of its own bespoke building was discussed for a block on Avenue Paulista, where the Trianon and its belvedere stood with views over the city. In 1951, a pavilion for the first São Paulo Art Biennial was built on the site, which started to decay soon after the event. The pavilion was demolished in 1957 by the city government, which wanted to create a public square on the site.

In designing MASP, Lina Bo Bardi aimed at something beyond simply a suitable space for an art collection. The museum was to offer courses, seminars, conferences, and other activities that would attract an audience and promote the public’s relationship with art. The museographical project was intended to welcome audiences with little familiarity with museums, a rarity in the city at that time.

In 1958, Bo Bardi presented the first version of her (uncommissioned) design for MASP to Mayor Adhemar de Barros, who was very enthusiastic. However, the Secretary of Urban Works, José Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz, claimed that the city had no funds to commission the project, as the department’s budget was fully committed to the completion of Ibirapuera Park. Even with the support of Assis Chateaubriand and his political connections, Bo Bardi was unable to pursue her design.

In 1959, the Bahia State government invited Lina Bo Bardi to run the Museum of Modern Art in Salvador, and she accepted. The following year, she got a telegram informing her that the construction of MASP was about to start. There is no record of why or how city funds had been released, but construction was approved, with an agreement establishing responsibility for the building and its administration with the Museum Director, and responsibility for construction with the city. Lina Bo Bardi gave up her fees, both for the design and for the supervision of construction, as did the engineer José Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz, responsible for realising the challenging concrete structure.

2b) Context
The 1950s was a period of great expansion and transformation in the city of São Paulo, accelerating a process begun in the late 19th century, and still ongoing. With its economic and cultural expansion came cultural institutions: libraries, museums, theatres, cinemas, etc. Despite the modern "carioca" tradition had already presented as early as in the 1940s in a number of internationally renowned works – the Ministry of Education and Health, the Pampulha Complex, the headquarters for the Brazilian Association for the Press – the
The establishment of the Modern Movement beyond isolated buildings in the context of São Paulo would only gain ground in the 1950s. There were several contributing factors to this growth of architectural Modernism in São Paulo: the establishment of the regional office of the Brazilian Institute of Architects (IBA); the exhibition Brazil Builds at the Galeria Prestes Maia; the first Brazilian Congress of Architects; the creation of two art museums, and the separation of architecture courses from engineering schools.

The exchange of ideas with European professionals accelerated after World War II, as they arrived seeking refuge in Brazil from the devastation in Europe. The return of democracy to Brazil, and the greater freedom for Brazilians to travel abroad, especially to the US and Europe, also stimulated architectural theory and practice in São Paulo.

The arrival in the city of architects like Lina Bo Bardi, Giancarlo Palanti, Victor Reif, Lucjan Korngold, Bernard Rudofsky, Daniele Calabi, Adolf Franz Heep and Jorge Zalzupin, among others, ensured development. All of them were already working professionals, enriching the cultural environment of the city, now much more open to modern ideas. While they were still unlicensed to practice on their own, they worked in established architectural practices, where they absorbed local architectural culture and disseminated their own, before gradually setting up their own practices.

The newly installed IAB regional office had a decisive influence on the direction of Paulista architecture, and it became a meeting point for professionals to exchange ideas that began to influence the built environment:

…futuristic architecture was becoming the modern style, more and more diffused and accepted, up to the moment when any architect, even a conservative one, drafts its design according to the canons that not long ago had been the object of laughter, scandal and even contempt. (Antonio Candido 1985: XIII)

Encouraged by this, established architects such as Oswaldo Arthur Bratke, Eduardo Kneese de Melo, Ícaro de Castro Mello and João Vilanova Artigas started to design proposals more and more committed to Modernist aesthetics. Richard Neutra’s 1945 visit to the city of São Paulo, and the 1948 translation into Portuguese of his book Architecture of Social Concern in Regions of Mild Climate, with a prologue by Gregory Warchavchik, introduced West Coast American architecture to Paulistas. And Towards an Organic Architecture, written by Bruno Zevi and published in 1949, put Frank Lloyd Wright back on the agenda.

In 1948, in addition to MASP, another museum was founded through the initiative of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (Ciccillo) – the Museum of Modern Art (MAM), designed by Vilanova Artigas. These two museums, together with the newly-opened City Library, which also displayed an art collection, offered a cultural experience “which could only be seen yesterday if we crossed the Atlantic” (Diário de S. Paulo, 1947:1).

1954 was the 400th anniversary of the São Paulo’s founding, and was to be a celebration of the city’s modernity, and a reminder of what it had left behind. A wide variety of projects were funded, among which was an architectural conference with Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Jose Luis Sert and Ernest Nathan Rogers in attendance, an international exhibition of architecture with works by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Jose Luis Sert, and a retrospective of Brazilian architecture organized by Lucio Costa and Alcides da Rocha Miranda. The Casa Bandeirista and Ibirapuera Park were both restored for the
anniversary, decisive for the local architectural culture. The Ibirapuera Park complex, designed to accommodate the events for the 400th anniversary of the city, was the major investment of the commission, the equivalent of the 1951 Festival of Britain in London. It was supposed to be versatile enough to house very different exhibitions, from industrial equipment to art, from household appliances to historic documents. It was also to be a milestone in the modernising of the city. Oscar Niemeyer, already internationally known, was appointed to lead a team composed of architects Eduardo Kneese de Mello, Hélio Uchoa Cavalcanti, Zenon Lotufo, Carlos Lemos and Gaus Estelita.

An important conduit for the dissemination of architectural projects and ideas was the journal *Habitat*, created in 1950 by Pietro and Lina Bo Bardi, which soon became a reference point for architects. With a similar format to the Californian magazine *Arts & Architecture*, *Habitat* included a wide range of topics, including essays on fine art.

The most important catalyst for São Paulo’s modern architecture, however, was the design and construction of Brasília (1956-60), the nation’s new capital. Beyond the architectural repertoire established by Brasilia, it had a marked effect on the public’s interest in architecture, the acceptance of the value of urban planning, and the number of young people wanting to join the profession.

If in the economic sphere, development through top-down initiatives was the most important agenda, from a cultural standpoint, the counter-culture movement of the late 1950s found support from left-leaning artists and intellectuals, who saw in popular culture an alternative path to national culture, an increasingly provocative alternative after the military coup in 1964.

2c) Programme
In addition to the usual exhibition and technical services areas, the new museum was to meet the educational agenda of the museum, with spaces such as an auditorium and a library.

2d) Practice: Private | Client: Public and private
The architect Lina Bo Bardi was an independent architect, with a very selective production. Most of her designs were for institutions, with a few private residences. The Director of MASP was in charge of delivering the building and the collection. The São Paulo city government was responsible for financing the structure.

3. POLICY AND IDEOLOGY
3a) Planning policy in São Paulo
Mid-20th century, São Paulo was the fastest growing city in the world, a cause of pride and anxiety, but accepted as a necessary condition to make the city great, one that should be stimulated, not repressed:
Progress becomes vertiginous and the São Paulo metropolis bursts the ties of its urban waistcoat. Neighbouring cities aggregate to the huge city mass, valleys are populated, rivers and streams are channelled, viaducts are built, new roads are open in every direction, and new urban maps present an aspect of a huge spider with its legs extended in several directions. ... Its miraculous upward curve, which is a reason of pure pride, gets too far from the administrative solutions’ development curves. Neither urban remodelling actions nor public utilities were able to follow it. But its barbaric adolescence does not fear future times. There are a thousand and one obstacles to be beaten, but they shall not be impediments that cannot be pushed aside with hard work and tenacity. (Milliet 1954: n.p.)

In the 1950s, the city commissioned a plan for improvements (Plano de Melhoramentos da Cidade), prepared by engineer Robert Moses from IBEC – International Basic Economy Corporation, of which Nelson Rockefeller was chairman. The study aimed to reconcile two competing attitudes to urbanisation. Francisco Prestes Maia’s group advocated expansion and free growth. Anhaia Mello’s group advocated planning controls and limits to growth. One of the most controversial issues was urban “verticalisation”. The Prestes Maia group advocated high buildings and few limits on height. The Anhaia Mello group called for a halt to vertical growth. The 1950 Moses Report, Programa de Melhoramentos Públicos para a cidade de São Paulo, did not see growth as a problem in itself. The problems it caused with regard to road infrastructure, sanitation, green areas, and transport could be solved through appropriate investment (Campos and Somekh 2002: 88).

In opposition to the Moses report was another study, developed between 1956 and 1957, at the request of Mayor Wladimir de Toledo Piza by SAGMACS - Sociedade para a Análise Gráfica e Mecanográfica Aplicada aos Complexos Sociais. This prioritised the improvement of the quality of life for the population as a whole. With a change in city administration, however, the study never became a plan, but had an influence on future urban planning, and gave a taste of integrated urban planning, in which spatial plans took into account the political, the social, the economic, the administrative, and urban design (Antonucci 2002: 96).

The Moses plan failed to reconcile opposing approaches, and the city continued to grow in a semi-planned, semi-unplanned way. The Avenue Paulista area, which had been home to large mansions until the 1940s, started to be verticalised in the 1960s, when it became the financial centre of the city.

3b) Political parties

**Municipal Politics - Mayors**


Prestes Maia (1961-1965), National Democratic Union – UDN

José Vicente Faria Lima (1965-1969), Republican Party - PR

3c) Client’s position
The construction of the MASP involved its Director, Assis Chateaubriand, and the city government through three different mayors. Assis Chateaubriand was a powerful businessman in the communications field. He owned newspapers, magazines, and the first TV channel in Brazil. From the 1920s on, he published the work of modern artists in his newspapers.

3d) Architects’ position

Trained as an architect in Italy, Lina Bo Bardi made a singular contribution to Brazilian architecture. Through an intense relationship with Brazilian arts and culture, Bo Bardi produced architectural designs, sets and costumes, exhibitions, museum displays, and a journal. She strongly believed in art for all and access to that art for all, a belief realised in MASP (1957) and the SESC- Pompéia (1975). She was fully committed to the Trianon site for MASP: “I thought that place was the only and single one where a Museum of Modern Art could be built, the only one worth being considered the “basis” for the first Latin America’s Art Museum”.

In São Paulo, a group of young award-winning architects and professors (Joaquim Guedes, Carlos Millan, Paulo Mendes da Rocha and Fábio Penteado), under the guidance of Vilanova Artigas, led the cultural debate of the period, and exposed concrete as the ideal means to express their architecture. Since the 1920s, reinforced concrete had become almost the only structural material used in Brazil. The technology of concrete was easily adapted to existing conditions, both in terms of the availability of cement and stone, and a relatively simple construction technology understandable by a relatively unskilled workforce.

Regardless of its considerable technical quality, the adoption of concrete for the building structures in Brazil is explained by economic reasons, relating to conflicts of interest between manufacturers of steel industrial components and the cement oligopoly, which had an all-embracing political articulation. Also, there was a huge need of investments for steel production, in a country with abundant and low-cost labour. (Somekh1997: 83).

The aggressive materiality of exposed concrete sat well with the arguments for austerity and authenticity that filled discourse in the arts during the post-war period, and which culminated in Brutalism, an architectural movement dominant from the 1950s through the 1970s, and fit well with the paulistano way of thinking. Questioning development-centred policies and economic dependence on North America, and championing nationalism over cosmopolitanism as a means of resisting economic, if not military imperialism, these architects saw exposed concrete as a means of expressing values such as freedom and equality. Somehow, the use of concrete presented a resistance against a capitalist world guilty of exploitation and land speculation. Given its formal and material characteristics, and Bo Bardi’s theoretical and ethical positions, MASP can be considered one of the most representative examples of the Brutalist movement in Brazil.
4. DESIGN

4a) Design intentions (client)

As one of Latin America’s foremost art collectors, Assis Chateaubriand understandably wanted an architectural landmark for his museum, and would have indicated this to MASP’s architect. As the other client, Mayor Adhemar de Barros, living in the shadow of the construction of Brasília, also wanted an innovative and daring construction, to promote his image as a progressive leader. de Barros’s successor as mayor, Prestes Maia, showed little appreciation of culture, and it is not surprising that he decided to interrupt the construction of the museum during his administration (1961-1963).

4b) Design intentions (architect)

It took nearly a decade to complete MASP and, it was finally opened in 1968. In 1951, Bo Bardi had already attempted a similar solution for a museum design in São Vicente, which was never built. Alfredo Reidy’s designs for the Colégio Brasil Paraguai (1952) and for MAM (the Modern Art Museum - 1953) in Rio de Janeiro, must have nourished her imagination. On the MASP site, the land use restrictions to guarantee open views towards the city and to avoid interfering with an underground tunnel, led Bo Bardi to develop the design with the structural engineer João Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz. The partnership ended up creating the remarkable 75-meter span of the building, the longest allowed by the lot.

At first, the museum had been envisioned as a closed box, but during the design, Bo Bardi decided on transparency, and proposed that glazing enclose the entire length of the museum on both sides. She then designed the system for exhibiting the work, with paintings freed from walls, enabling a walk through the artworks. In tune with new museographical concepts developed by Franco Albini, Frederick Kiesler and others, which she herself had already tested when the museum was in Chateaubriand’s Diários Associados Building, Bo Bardi specified glass easels, aiming to “desacralise” the works of art, and encourage a new relationship between visitor and object: “During the design process of the MASP, on Avenue Paulista, I sought a simple architecture able to quickly communicate what was once called monumental. That is the sense of a collective, of civic dignity” (Lina Bo Bardi, Instituto Lina Bo P. M. Bardi, São Paulo, 1993: 100–115).

Her commitment to accessibility and the demystification not only of art, but of art museums, is clear:

With MASP, I only wanted to resume certain stances. I even sought (and I intend it to happen) to recreate the ambiance of the Trianon. I would like people to be there, to see outdoor exhibitions, and talk, listen to music and watch movies. I would like children to be there and play under the morning and the late afternoon sun, and even music bands and everyday bad taste, which can be another option as long as they are dealt with without sentimentality. (0 novo Trianon, 195767 – Mirante das Artes, São Paulo, n.5, set-out. 1967, pp. 20-23)

4c) Material/ Construction/ Environment

Simple finishes
Exposed concrete, whitewash painting, Goias stone flooring for the large civic hall, tempered glass, plastic walls, industrial black rubber flooring for indoor surfaces.
Exposed concrete and glass
Structure in pre-stressed concrete

The building has a 70m. free span, with a 5m. cantilever on each side, and an 8m. floor-to-ceiling height without any columns, supported on four pillars connected by two central girders under the art gallery floor. The lower floor of the art gallery, housing the offices, temporary and private exhibition rooms, libraries, and etc. is suspended from two large beams by steel rods. An outdoor stairway and an elevator in steel and tempered glass allow the two floors to communicate. All the installations including the air-conditioning are visible. (Bo Bardi 1997: 12)

The building was erected on the site of the old Trianon Belvedere, on Avenue Paulista, across from the Siqueira Campos Park, at the intersection of two strategic thoroughfares, Avenue Paulista and Avenue Nove de Julho. This increases access to the museum, but also noise and pollution. The foundations of the building are exactly at the ends of the plot, avoiding the Avenue Nove de Julho tunnel below.

Regardless of the fact that the new design was born from the demands imposed by the city government to maintain the old belvedere, the proposed location guaranteed a privileged view of the downtown area of the city: “the ball room demanded by the city government in 1957 will be replaced by a civic hall, where parties can be thrown, but it will be designed with the hope of being transformed” (Lina Bo Bardi).

In the 1990s, the metro reached the area, and the Trianon-MASP station is located about one block from the museum.

5. RECEPTION

5a) Reception by media and specialists

The connection between the MASP and the businessmen Assis Chateaubriand, who owned a powerful TV channel, ended up compromising the diffusion of the work among its competitors. Its inauguration, however, was front page news in the newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo (08 Nov. 1968: 1) because H.M. Elizabeth II opened the building when she visited Brazil. The focus, however, was on the Queen not the museum. There wasn’t a single comment on the architect who designed the building.

O Estado de S. Paulo, 08 nov. 1968: 1

Winston Churchill comes to Queen Elizabeth’s mind. When she rides the glass lift and heads for the painting exhibition at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, she is still unaware of the pleasant surprise waiting for her. When the elevator door opens, the Queen sees right in front of her the "Blue room" painting, by Winston Churchill. Surprised, she asks Professor Bardi how such a rare painting is in Brazil and he answers her that Brazil was the first country to exhibit a work of art painted by the great British statesman, in 1952.
The building's engineer, José Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz, is introduced to the queen. Elizabeth is quite pleased with the building and asks him if the construction was very difficult. The answer: It was difficult, Your Majesty, but with lots of persistence, we made it.

The visit is ending and the Queen is especially impressed by the disposition of the paintings, mounted on glass panels, which carry names and explanations at the back. Professor Bardi tells her that the intention was to create a habit, making the visitors look at the painting first, and then read the painter's name at the back of the panel.

From Queen Elizabeth's speech: "It gives me special pleasure to inaugurate this magnificent Art Museum. Its beauty, simplicity and construction skills make it another excellent example of the Paulistas entrepreneurship. I am also happy to know that it will house a collection of one of the most active and generous ambassadors who have been to Saint James court: Dr. Assis Chateaubriand. I remember very well his passionate spirit and personality and we are all deeply sorry he is not here with us today."

Montaner (1998:12):
By being so radically modern, Lina goes well beyond the international established language, introducing new elements to the repertoire of contemporary architecture. This is patently obvious, not only in the Brutalism, and in the relationship with its surroundings, or even in the fluid circulation without any obstacle, but also in the suppression of a main representative front façade facing Avenue Paulista and the city, replaced by a pure volume, without a monumental and emphatic entry, but one open lateral domestic and structural access at one end of the plaza that houses the large elevated deck with the museum. The museum's educational desire is also taken to its limits in the inside: each artistic piece is fully accessible. Supported by a concrete cube and with a glass panel as background, all works of art are equidistant, equally comparable and float in space, under a full light. This huge pedagogical motivation and drive to democratize art have been showing its results in stimulating many generations of Brazilian artists formed after the 1960s.

Bruand, 1981: 268
The new Trianon (1957-1969), headquarters of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, has also a privileged location; it gives us a different view of the glass box separated from the ground, and so appreciated by Lina Bo Bardi. ...The architect resumed the idea of a suspended block on porticoes, which she had already proposed for the São Vicente Museum (not built), but replaced the five transversal porticoes with two huge longitudinal porticoes made in pre-stressed concrete. By the size of the building and the fantastic load that would result from such separated supports, it was not the case to think of reducing their section; consequently, every expression based on lightness inherent to any building above the ground clashed with the existence of the four massive pillars at the ends, which is why Lina Bo Bardi opted decisively for a monumental solution based on a balanced force, where the emphasis lies on the amazing technical tour-de-force represented by the building, emphasising its considerable weight instead of insisting on its suspended character. So, in this case,
the Italian architect moved away from the trend that had hitherto been one of the trademarks of Brazilian architecture dominated by the Carioca School; at the same time, without changing her typically rationalist style, she approached the opposite research, carried out at the same time by the original movement that was flourishing in São Paulo, under the influence of Vilanova Artigas [the Brutalist Paulista School].

Segawa, 1997: 136

[Bo Bardi’s] main architectural accomplishment at this period was the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (1957-1968), which launched her as one of the great names in the Brazilian architectural scene, and whose work will have ramifications in the years 1970-1980. Currently, her work has been getting worldwide attention, especially after an exhibition and the book gathering her achievements, systematising a hitherto fragmented knowledge over the various facets of the architect, both as a muse and a cultural activist.

Conduru, 2004: 82

Lina Bo Bardi has totally opened the MASP’s ground floor (1957-1968), making it work at the same time as sidewalk, museum hall, plaza and belvedere – a truly public space, less for its availability to different collective uses than for the authentic appropriation by the city residents, a rare occurrence in the Brazilian culture. (CONDURU, 2004, p.82)
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General works about MASP and Lina Bo Bardi
FERRAZ, Marcelo Carvalho (org.) Lina Bo Bardi. São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo Bardi e P.M. Bardi, Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 1993.

Academic works about MASP and Lina Bo Bardi

Others