

## **Displacing o povo: Photography and the Sites of the Popular in MASP's *Habitat***

Adrian Anagnost

### **Author**

Adrian Anagnost is [Jessie Poesch](#) Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Tulane University in New Orleans.

### **ORCID**

### **Abstract**

This article examines the recognition of popular culture by Brazilian modernists, in relation to broader considerations of the popular for modernism in Latin America. This essay places discussions of the popular by Carlos Monsiváis, Marta Traba, and Jean Franco in conversation with those of Andreas Huyssen and Tom Crow, to argue that the Latin American popular has been interpreted as a function of site and embodiment, positioned between urbanity and rurality and between literacy and orality. Focusing on early 1950s issues of the Brazilian arts magazine *Habitat*, and exhibitions at the São Paulo Museum of Art, this essay shows how photographic images collapsed distinctions between the popular and the modern. At the same time, however, photographs reiterated the popular as a set of rural and oral cultural forms, visualized in depictions of Black bodies set within popular architecture against the backdrop of Brazilian scenery.

Keywords: popular, photography, modernism, race, place

## **Deslocando o povo: Fotografia e os Lugares do Popular no *Habitat* do MASP**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo examina o reconhecimento da cultura popular pelos modernistas brasileiros, em relação a considerações mais amplas do popular para o modernismo na América Latina. Este ensaio contrapõe as discussões do popular de Carlos Monsiváis, Marta Traba e Jean Franco com as de Andreas Huyssen e Tom Crow, para afirmar que o popular latino-americano tem sido interpretado em função do local e do corpo, posicionado entre urbanidade e ruralidade e entre alfabetização e oralidade. Com foco nas edições do início da década de 1950 da revista de arte brasileira *Habitat* e em exposições no Museu de Arte de São Paulo, este ensaio mostra como as imagens fotográficas reduzem as distinções entre o popular e o moderno. Ao mesmo tempo, no entanto, as fotografias reiteraram o popular como uma coleção de formas culturais rurais e orais, visualizadas em representações de corpos negros na arquitetura popular contra o pano de fundo de paisagens brasileiras.

### **Palavras-chave:**

o popular, fotografia, modernismo, raça, lugar

## Déplacer o povo: la photographie et les sites populaires dans l'*Habitat* du MASP

### Résumé

Cet article examine la reconnaissance de la culture populaire par les modernistes brésiliens, en relation avec des considérations plus larges du populaire pour le modernisme en Amérique latine. Cet essai met en conversation les discussions du populaire de Carlos Monsiváis, Marta Traba et Jean Franco avec celles d'Andreas Huyssen et Tom Crow, pour affirmer que le populaire latino-américain a été interprété comme une fonction de site et le corporel, positionné entre urbanité et ruralité et entre alphabétisation et oralité. En se concentrant sur les numéros du début des années 1950 du magazine d'art brésilien *Habitat* et sur des expositions au Musée d'art de São Paulo, cet essai montre comment les images photographiques réduisent les distinctions entre le populaire et le moderne. Dans le même temps, cependant, les photographies ont réitéré le populaire comme un ensemble de formes culturelles rurales et orales, visualisées dans des représentations de corps noirs dans l'architecture populaire sur fond de paysages brésiliens.

### Mots-clés:

le populaire, photographie, modernisme, race, site

[...] a beleza imaginativa de uma floresta, de uma cabana de pau-a-pique, de um pote marajoara, de uma igreja barroca, o Aleijadinho, os ourives da Bahia, os movelheiros manuelinos de Recife, os epígonos da missão francesa, os arquitetos do teatro de Manaus e os do Ministério da Educação e Saude do Rio, os pintores caipiras e os artistas de renome, ceramistas, os gameleiros do litoral, indígenas, africanos, descendentes de conquistadores, emigrantes<sup>1</sup>.

1 Prefácio to *Habitat* 1 (1950), p. 1.

This opening salvo of *Habitat* magazine, published by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, argued for a new and more expansive understanding of Brazilian art, one in which art from all corners of the nation would be gathered, undifferentiated. Brazilian art would encompass popular architecture and amateur painters, modernist architects and Baroque masters, as well as Indigenous pottery nearly a millennium gone. Five years after the end of Getúlio Vargas' polemical and even authoritarian Estado Novo, the essay's authors used modern photography and museum displays to assert equivalence among various strands of Brazilian culture. Ironically, the authors—curator and critic Pietro Maria Bardi and architect Lina Bo Bardi, who were married to each other—were not, themselves, Brazilian, but Italian immigrants whose relative inexperience with Brazilian art spurred their pluralistic views. The Bardis' interpretation of popular arts by Brazil's diverse inhabitants was not, then, mobilized towards or against Vargas' development of a patriotic *brasildade*, but was concerned with less local questions of the popular and the modern. When the Bardis published the first issue of *Habitat* in 1950, Brazil was experiencing an aesthetic transition between older notions of the popular still rooted in nineteenth-century Romantic nationalism and interwar avant-garde primitivisms, and the more Gramscian—and, at times, anti-U.S. cultural imperialist—take on the popular that came to the fore from the 1960s onward. At MASP and in the pages of *Habitat*, the Bardis thus sought to establish a modern frame for the Brazilian popular through modern photography and exhibition design. Yet the Bardis' visual tactics often continued holding the popular apart from the modern, by reiterating the links between popular expressive forms and Black and Brown bodies rooted in particular Brazilian landscapes.

In tracing the relationship between the modern and the popular for twentieth-century art in Brazil, we can consider depictions of « *o povo* » in modern art, as well as modern artists' interpretations of craft and of expressive practices created outside of formal institutions — typically by people without formal education. The 1889 founding of the Brazilian Republic spurred a new attentiveness to depicting the everyday lives of non-elite Brazilians in their « natural » settings, e.g., José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior's rural caipiras on paulista fazendas. Yet for Brazilian artists working in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, there was an uneasy tension between the development of a national school of painting and the apparent lack of a coherent national culture (Gonzaga Duque Estrada 1888, 241; Needell 1987, 178-179). This may seem characteristic of Western modernity more broadly, with artistic approaches to the popular poised between an emergent urban and international mass culture, and primitivizing imagery of regional or rural lifeways seeming ill equipped to represent a nation's modernity. The Brazilian antropofagia movement of the 1920s creatively disrupted this dichotomy, but privileged symbols of pre-contact Indigenous Brazil rather than contemporary popular forms. By the Vargas era (1930-45), popular aesthetic forms were absorbed into forms of state-sanctioned *brasilidade*, while visual artists such as Cândido Portinari and Emiliano Di Cavalcanti depicted popular lifeways as both affirmations and critiques of such a project (Williams 2001, 222).

In the transition period of the 1950s, modern art turned from depictions of the popular, to creating works aimed at a broad audience. In lieu of a national imaginary rooted in authentic, regional Brazil, these forms of Brazilian modern art imagined an emergent urban middle class, through aesthetic practices that intersected with commercial products and advertising, mass media, and corporate design (Anagnost

2021, 132). Given that these works assume a newly deracinated, urban, potentially classless Brazilian viewer, we would not consider such 1950s-60s works to be popular: corporate logos influenced by Brazilian Concrete Art (Longo 2007, 23-24), Lygia Clark's mid-1950s Concretist advertising vitrine for the Distrito Federal's Department of Tourism<sup>2</sup> the constructivist grid as Olivetti typewriter company « stand » created by Welsey Duke Lee and P. M. Bardi for an exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro<sup>3</sup>, late-1960s *Nova Figuração* artists' interpretations of newspaper images, and Cildo Meireles' use of distribution processes for mass produced objects such as soda bottles and currency in his « Inserções em circuitos ideológicos » (1970-75).

This distinction is not meant to reaffirm a Frankfurt School rejection of popular culture under conditions of capitalism in the absence of an authentic folk culture (Adorno 2002 [1932], 427; Adorno 1941) as taken up in Anglophone art history following U.S. critic Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay « Avant-Garde and Kitsch. » Such a model considers popular culture « as one consequence of the Western, capitalist, industrial, and democratic revolutions » (Hinds 1996, 12), and its paradigmatic art historical formulation comes in Tom Crow's foregrounding of modern art's « involvement » with « low or mass culture, » meaning « forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture » (Crow 1983, 215). Crow's examples—the cheap sign or carnival backdrop, « dissolute picnics » at the city's edge, U.S. traffic, neon signs, and commercialized Black music—are

2 Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Boletim de 1957, Archives do Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

3 Harry Laus, « Duke Lee realiza 'Penetrável', » *Jornal do Brasil*, May 18, 1967, cad. B, p. 2.

emphatically urban, and rooted in consumer culture of Western Europe and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1960s. At the time Crow was writing, in the 1980s, Anglophone scholarship on modern art and the popular was still responding to Greenberg's notion of kitsch, as a shorthand for urban mass culture. As Crow explains, Greenberg's canonical 1939 essay, « Avant-Garde and Kitsch, » drew a « rigid distinction [...] between popular culture and the modern phenomenon of kitsch. The former [popular culture] was for [Greenberg] inseparable from some integrated community comparable to the kind that sustained traditional high art; the latter [kitsch] was peculiarly modern, a product of rural migration to the cities and the immigrants' eager abandonment of the folk culture they brought with them » (Crow 1983, 222). Greenberg's discussion thus remained mired in what Andreas Huyssen has called « an older sociological model for analyzing modernity (tradition or indigenous culture vs. modernity, Gemeinschaft vs. Gesellschaft, etc.) » that fails to account for « the cross national cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, the colonial, and the postcolonial in the 'non-Western' world » (Huyssen 2005, 194-195). How, then, can we understand the relationship between modern art and the popular in Brazil, a nation where modernist artists and architects have often imagined the popular as regionalist and rooted in non-urban lifeways, where popular cultural forms are just as likely to be deployed for State propaganda seeking to incorporate « o povo » into a national body politic, as commercialized for private profit?

Across twentieth-century Latin America, intellectuals complicated any easy distinction between an organic, rural popular culture and an alienated, urban mass culture. In the 1970s, Argentine-Colombian art critic Marta Traba and Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis posed questions about the site-specificity of the popular. For example,

Traba emphasized the relative illegibility of Pop, happenings, and media art in a Latin American context, since

[S]iendo el actual arte norteamericano un arte referido a circunstancias, objetos y visualizaciones ‘urbanas’, debe ser también reimplantado en zonas urbanas; en este caso, es necesario recordar que en nuestras ciudades casi la tercera parte de la población proviene de éxodos campesinos y de migraciones, y que vive en condiciones peculiares determinadas por el desempleo, la anomía y la desadaptación, que la marginan de toda participación en una posible vida cultural (Traba 1972, 20-21).

Traba insisted that much of Latin America’s urban « *población* » remained culturally linked to rural lifeways rather than being immersed in the mass media and consumer goods referenced by modern artists in North America. Yet as British-U.S. literary critic Jean Franco explained two decades later, this framework remains limited in its understanding of « the popular » as « an index of Latin American difference, a difference that was measured by the *distance* from the metropolis [...] equally, popular culture served as an index of underdevelopment » (Franco 1999 [1996], 209). Writing around the same time as Traba, Carlos Monsiváis offered an alternate approach, emphasizing instead the *process* of producing the popular. For Monsiváis, the popular was produced by means of conflict between various social positions: « Lo que entre nosotros ha habido con ese nombre ‘cultura popular’ es fruto de la voluntad de las clases dominantes y de las adaptaciones gozosas y anárquicas hechas por las masas a tal plan de dominio » (Monsiváis 1978, 98). In contrast with Traba’s explicit opposition to

U.S. cultural imperialism, Monsiváis's take on popular culture in Mexico resonates with broader reevaluations of popular culture then being carried out by thinkers such as Jamaican-British cultural theorist Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. For Hall, the central question was «not the 'authenticity' or organic wholeness of popular culture,» but «a continuous tension (relationship, influence and antagonism) to the dominant culture,» in which neither popular nor dominant occupied a fixed pole (Hall 1981 [1979], 235; Denning 1990, 5-9). Argentine-Mexican anthropologist Néstor García Canclini summed up such arguments for the Latin American case in 1989, when he rejected reified visions of Latin American popular culture in terms of «folklore [that] maintains a certain cohesion and resistance in indigenous communities, or rural areas, and in 'urban spaces of extreme marginality'» (García Canclini 1995 [1989], 181). Instead, Canclini argued for the study of popular in relation to «the heterogeneous implementation of the [sic] modernizing project in our continent» (García Canclini 1995 [1989], 182). Such a framework can allow us to avoid pigeonholing the Latin American popular into class positions or histories of urbanization more characteristic of Western European or U.S. modernity, and instead to analyze local sites and conditions in which the idea of the popular has been defined and questioned.

For Brazilian modern art, the status of the popular is specifically bound up with local conditions of place and mediation. This is not simply a conflict between urban cosmopolitanism as modern and rural regionalism as popular, but a persistent re-negotiation of the meaning of «the popular» in the absence of a singular dominant national-popular culture. Speaking at a music festival in 1982, Brazilian music critic José Ramos Tinhorão delineated six cultural *camadas* in Brazil, situated along a



gradient from (1) a regional, « underdeveloped » culture linked to « the reality of the rural world, » a culture « not learned in books, [which is] called folkloric » to (6) an institutionalized elite culture of art salons, university chairs, cultural councils, etc. (Tinhorão 2001 [1982], 197-198). Different forms of variously urban « popular culture » occupied the intervening four layers:

(2) a cultura popular dos pequenos centros urbanos ou das periferias das grandes cidades, a qual—pela origem rural recente da maior parte da população—se configura em subprodutos quer da cultura regional [...] quer da cultura urbana de massa [...] (3) a cultura popular urbana não livresca [...] também impregnada de vestígios da cultura rural, particularmente dos grupos de trabalhadores não qualificados e da gente pobre da cidade em geral [...] (4) a cultura popular urbana já impregnada, através da educação escolar, de informações escritas [...] ou oral visual (rádio e televisão) [...] (5) a cultura popular urbana da classe média emergente, com acesso à universidade [...] atualmente influenciada pelos modelos estrangeiros (Tinhorão 2001 [1982], 197-198).

Tinhorão traces a set of interlocking institutional, spatial, and media trajectories—from the outskirts of a city to the halls of power, from regional to cosmopolitan, and from embodied orality toward greater facility with the written, published word. In this model, popular culture occupies a constantly shifting in-between zone, defined not by any specific cultural practices, but by positionality with regard to recognition by formal institutions (the university, the publishing house, the museum). Tinhorão's list of *camadas* does not establish a teleology of particular expressive forms, but establishes a

gradient of mediation between some imagined rural authenticity (the Gramscian folkloric) apart from a purely deterritorialized modern urbanity (in the manner of Lukács's transcendental homelessness) which has never existed. Between these unreal poles, popular expressivity might take form.

The association of the popular with place and embodied forms of mediation has historical roots. Discussing the distinction between popular orality and written culture of the « dominant » colonizers across Latin America, literary critic Jean Franco argued that, « it was the slave barracks and the urban *barrio* as well as the Indian *comunidad* which produced exciting new variants of language and form, » which the « dominant class » all-too-often abstracted and turned to « reactionary, nationalistic ends » (Franco 1975, 69-70). In the history of Brazilian art, we can see this distinction between orality and « the lettered » in Almeida Júnior's 1890s paintings. In counterpoint to the modern erudition of white bourgeois women reading, sewing, or playing music in luxurious interiors that might be located in any town, Almeida Júnior depicted São Paulo State and its ambiguously raced caipiras loosely grasping tools of trade (ax, gun, basket) or implements for leisure (whittling knife, guitar, smoking pipe): popular expressivity was handicraft and orality.

**IMAGE 1 - José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior (Itu, 1850 – Piracicaba, 1899), « Caipira picando fumo », 1893 (huile sur toile, 202 x 141 cm) Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo**

This distinction was still in play when Franco wrote in the 1970s. In the wake of the Latin American literary « boom, » Franco articulated her opposition to a socially

decontextualized New Criticism by urging readers of Latin American literature to attend to historical forms of oral tradition and performance, emphasizing a « direct relationship between the oral performer and the community » (Franco 1975, 69). Yet we should be wary of the danger of distinguishing between a characteristically literate, erudite, and de-territorialized modern and a spontaneous, embodied, sited and possibly perniciously racialized popular.

Brazilian modernism's approach to the popular is shadowed by the nation's uneven efforts to grapple with race, and we should distinguish between modernist primitivism and modern takes on the popular. The primitivism of Brazilian artists is visible in atavistic visions of Afro-descendent and indigenous figures as fertile sources for renewing Brazilian art, visible in works such as Tarsila do Amaral's paintings « A Negra » (1923) and « Abaporu » (1928). But if these figures remained relegated to a timeless past, the Brazilian popular occupied a position at the precipice of being subsumed and negated by modernity, those middle zones of Tinhorão's gradient. We can think of Tarsila do Amaral's « Religião brasileira » (1927), based on a folk altar she glimpsed at the urban margins of São Paulo, or paintings of the Northeastern bandit Lampião by Carybé (1940) and Cândido Portinari (1947), depicting the Northeast region's uneasy incorporation into Brazil's modernizing project (Albuquerque 1999, 55 et 90). It is a marker of the absorption of different groups of Brazilians into a national conception of *o povo* that their contemporary leisure activities be absorbed—as « the popular »—into the modern art canon. When modern artists drew upon the Brazilian popular, then, this tended to take the form of « involvement » (in Crow's sense) with embodied leisure activities by non-elites—disproportionately Black, Pardo, Indigenous, and mixed-race—rooted in terrains specific to Brazil's cities and its campo: caipiras

whittling in the ochre-tinted hinterlands of São Paulo State, the stark black on diaphanous paper of literatura de cordel wafting in the arid Nordeste, late-night samba dancing at the edge of Rio de Janeiro's morros and asfalto. Modern art's take on the popular was a form of searching, seeking Brazil as place, finally located through the rootedness of many popular leisure activities in quintessentially Brazilian topographies or built environs. In a country whose modern self-identity revolved around efforts to unify a racially diverse populace into a singular notion of *brasilidade* (Holanda 2016 [1936]; Freyre 1936; Monteiro 2017), artists drew upon popular expressions at the fringes of modernization to locate or create iconographies of the nation. But how would understandings of the popular change, as modern institutions absorbed popular cultural forms?

### **Musée Imaginaire**

O Museu gosta muito de 'trabalhar' com sua clientela popular, com a gente que vem nos visitar chegando da rua, e que entrando tira o chapéu, que olha com admiração e com respeito, que exprime seus comentários sem subentendidos críticos, sem ocultas finalidades vaidosas<sup>4</sup>.

The Brazilian arts magazine *Habitat*, first published in December 1950 by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), marks a crucial hinge point in this narrative of the modern and the popular, since it introduced a new repertoire of popular forms to an emergent urban middle class. *Habitat* began publication in the wake of the Vargas era (1930-45), a time when official patronage for popular culture had been largely limited to popular music, reshaped to promote state-approved notions of *brasilidade* (Williams

4 Wolfgang Pfeiffer, « Pinacoteca do Museu de Arte. », *Habitat* 2 (1951), p. 35.

2001; McCann 2004; Batista 2004). Meanwhile, Brazil's best-known modern artists of the Vargas era depicted « *o povo* » in paintings and prints, e.g., Emiliano Di Cavalcanti's 1920s-40s depictions of racially diverse participants taking part in Rio de Janeiro's working class nightlife, and Cândido Portinari's 1930s paintings of mestiço and Afro-descendent farm workers in moments of repose<sup>5</sup>. It is no surprise that *Habitat* emerged in 1950s São Paulo, an increasingly urbanized state whose regional identity was bound up in self-image as modern and, implicitly, white—in contrast to the « racialization of regional difference » that characterized popular imagery of Brazil's other regions (Weinstein 2015, 10). In this context, the popular was easily measured in terms of distance from São Paulo's presumed neutral position as Brazil's apex of de-territorialized modernity. Though *Habitat* aspired to national reach, its position was emphatically *paulistano*: an aggressive modernism that was itself a form of regionalism. At the MASP and in the pages of *Habitat*, modern display and the selective use of vanguard photographic techniques popularized the modern *and* incorporated popular art into the modern museum—without collapsing distinctions between modern and popular. Ultimately, the museum and magazine sustained « the popular » as a distinct category by retaining the association of popular *architecture* with regional difference and racialized bodies.

Founded in 1947 by Brazilian media magnate Assis Chateaubriand, the MASP used modern museographical techniques to exhibit a broad range of Brazilian and international art, including historical and contemporary works of craft and applied art. Museum director Pietro Maria Bardi, an architecture critic and curator who had recently

<sup>5</sup> I would argue that Portinari's *retirantes* paintings are allegorical rather than images of the popular.

emigrated from Italy, rejected the « fable of progress and regress in the arts » (Bardi 1956, 22), as the scope of MASP's early exhibitions makes evident: from Brazilian painter Cândido Portinari (1948-49) to the history of chair design (1948), from U.S. artist Alexander Calder (1948) to popular « Cerâmica nordestina » (1949). To unify these heterogenous art objects, P. M. Bardi and his collaborator, architect Lina Bo Bardi, established a set of modernizing display conventions. Rejecting « romantic » nineteenth-century historicism, the Bardis favored « proper lighting, » jargon-free wall labels, glass vitrines, and metal tubes whose orderly vertical lines and parallel grids would rid even « the thorniest problems in the history of art » of their « veil of mystery » (Bardi 1956, 14; Anagnost 2019, 705-707). *Habitat* magazine provided a parallel arena in which the Bardis articulated their vision of using modern visual strategies to address a « clientela popular »<sup>6</sup>, and of legitimating modern, popular, and applied arts as part of the purview of the modern (although not necessarily *modernist*) museum.

In both the museum and the magazine, the Bardis' visual strategies paralleled André Malraux's contemporaneous idea of a *Musée Imaginaire*. Writing in a France at the cusp of de-colonization, Malraux imagined artworks from the world over—« les arts archaïques, les sculptures indienne, chinoise et précolombienne des hautes époques, une partie de l'art byzantin, les fresque romaines, des arts sauvages et populaires »—plucked from their origin points and brought together in the setting of the museum (Malraux 1947, 17). Supplemented by memory and by photographs of absent masterpieces, individual viewers create their own version of a global artistic imaginary. The MASP's

6 Wolfgang Pfeiffer, « Pinacoteca do Museu de Arte. », *Habitat 2* (1951), p. 35.

heterogeneous exhibition program fit Malraux's globalist—if still colonialist—view of the art museum's purview.

**IMAGE 2 - « Museu de Arte » *Habitat 1* (1950): 42-43.**

The Bardis' «Didactic Exhibitions» too, shared Malraux's emphasis on juxtaposed photographic reproductions (Bardi 1956, 22; Williams 2009; Canas 2010, 80-81; Politano 2010, 176). Running alongside shorter temporary exhibitions, the «Didactic Exhibitions» were long-running displays consisting primarily of photographic reproductions and texts explaining artistic movements and historical contexts. As Helouise Costa has traced, Brazilian art institutions were, at this time, practiced at staging exhibitions comprised of reproductions (Costa 2014, 107-132; Costa 2018, 257-262). Examples include the São Paulo Biblioteca Municipal's late-1940s exhibitions of photographic reproductions borrowed from U.S. museums such as MoMA, the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art's exhibitions of reproductions, most also borrowed from abroad, and the MASP's own didactic exhibitions. The MASP «Didactic Exhibitions» adhere closely to Malraux's vision, since they were not solely reproductions of masterpieces, but included details and diagrammatic images that sought to establish stylistic continuities and ruptures. Like the permanent collection, the «Didactic Exhibitions» were mounted on metal tubes stretching from floor to ceiling. However, while the paintings hung on discrete metallic tubes, the «Didactic Exhibitions» were arranged in orderly rows of juxtaposed panels, filled nearly edge to edge with photographs, drawings, and texts. The display suggested a pages magazine

layout lifted vertical and transferred to the halls of the museum (Canas 2010, 39; Lima 2013, 44).

Additionally, the Bardis created what they called the « Vitrine of Forms, » a set of glass cases exhibiting artworks, industrial design, and crafts—e.g., an Olivetti typewriter, Roman glass, popular Northeastern ceramics—in a glass case, arranged without any obvious regard to medium or chronology but with an eye to form and proportion (Politano 2010, 91-92)<sup>7</sup>. In combination with the artworks on metal tubes suspended away from the walls, the transparent vitrine positioned multiple art objects at different distances within viewers' sight lines for comparison. Just as Malraux advocated for « confrontations » between works metamorphosed from their original contexts by becoming museum objects, P. M. Bardi explained that the MASP Pinacoteca « contains elements that we are so used to considering as distinct, both in period and expression, that the first sight of them the side by side is a startling experience »; such an experience « may serve as an aid to understanding and set the mind working on new lines » (Bardi 1956, 22).

**IMAGE 3 - « Museu de Arte » *Habitat 1* (1950): 34.**

In *Habitat*, the Bardis used the formal possibilities of photographic imagery to popularize the modern and to insert the popular within the space of the modern. The inaugural issue of *Habitat* began with an unsigned article proclaiming that, « A história das artes no Brasil continua ainda em grande parte inédita »<sup>8</sup>. Likely written by Lina Bo Bardi in collaboration with P. M. Bardi, this text established the scope of a modern

7 « Vitrine das Formas. », *Habitat 1* (1950), p. 35.

8 Prefácio to *Habitat 1* (1950), p. 1.



Brazilian arts magazine as one that would go beyond the familiar canon of Brazilian painters such as Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, Cândido Portinari, Lasar Segall, and Emiliano di Cavalcanti—though these modern masters, too, would have their place at MASP and in the pages of *Habitat*. Throughout this first issue of *Habitat*, the articles' diverse subject matter evidenced the Bardis' expansive view of Brazilian artistic production, even as photographs subsumed multifarious works to conventions of modern display. As explained in the issue's prefácio,

[D]edicaremos pois ensaios à história da arte brasileira afim de fundir os tempos numa só época sem a balisa das classificações, dividindo o antigo do assim chamado moderno [...]. A beleza imaginativa de uma floresta, de uma cabana de pau-a-pique, de um pote marajoara, de uma igreja barroca, o Aleijadinho, os ourives da Bahia, os movelheiros manuelinos de Recife, os epígonos da missão francesa, os arquitetos do teatro de Manaus e os do Ministério da Educação e Saude do Rio, os pintores caipiras e os artistas de renome, ceramistas, os gameleiros do litoral, indígenas, africanos, descendentes de conquistadores, emigrantes, todos os que contribuíram, conti nuam contribuindo f' participam de alguma forma da arte no Brasil, terão as suas atividades registradas em « Habitat » com o empenho de quem sabe apreciar o que de mais característico tem o país<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, the first issue contained a dizzying array of artworks. An article about indigenous featherwork was followed by a report on vernacular architecture of the Amazon. A selection of « Ex-votos do Nordeste » came before an ad for MASP's « 1a 9 Prefácio to *Habitat* 1 (1950), p. 1.

Salão Nacional de Propaganda. » Abstracted walls and cityscapes by modernist photographer Geraldo de Barros—some of which would be exhibited at MASP the following year—preceded photographic details of floral stonework accompanying an article on « o stilo floreal » in São Paulo architecture.

It was through the medium of photography that *Habitat*—and MASP more broadly—sought to effect conceptual equivalence, the valorization of art not according to some canon, nor to time period or geographical origin. *Habitat* emerged amid the 1950s expansion of photographically illustrated magazines such as *O Cruzeiro* or *Manchete*, which afforded a broader national reach for imagery traditionally associated with distinct regional identities. *Habitat* differentiates itself from this broader trend by foregrounding formal concerns. Like André Malraux's *Le Musée Imaginaire*, the flattening effects of photography reduced or eliminate the relevance of artworks as *objects* to instead foreground the centrality of style (Crimp 1980, 53). *Habitat* showed ex-votos arranged with resolutely frontal gazes, industrial fabrics flattened to take on the look of abstract paintings, and building fragments cropped to foreground figurative details.

In the pages of *Habitat*, photographic techniques collapsed modern and popular through formal flattening and selective cropping that placed artworks in a generic display context and plucked architectural details from their settings. *Habitat* 1, for example, featured a mini portfolio of works by modernist photographer Geraldo de Barros, consisting of abstracted urban details such as an angled wall or curtained window flattened through the camera lens. In the same issue, Barros also contributed photographs to *Habitat*'s « artes aplicadas » section.

**IMAGE 4 - « Fotografias » *Habitat 1* (1950): 64. Photographs by Geraldo de Barros.**

**IMAGE 5 - Artes aplicadas: « Tecidos de A. M. Fiocca » and « O sizal » *Habitat 1* (1950): 60-61. Photographs by Geraldo de Barros.**

The « Artes aplicadas » section included modern fabrics by textile designer Annamaria Fiocca, who was beginning to work with « contrastes de côres inspirados na produção dos índios brasileiros »; panels woven from traditional sisal plant fibers newly marketed as industrially-produced textiles; and modern weaving by Bauhaus-trained artist Clara Hartoch. In all these cases—Barros' own modernist photographs of the city, photographs of industrially manufactured objects, and photographs of modernist design—Barros pushed textured objects to the foreground, deployed extreme closeup, and flattened textile patterns against the picture plane in ways that evoked modernist abstraction. Similarly, Barros photographed vases by Brazilian modernist Elisabeth Nobling on dramatically lit surfaces devoid of visual clues as to context, domestic or otherwise. This staging was echoed in photographer Roberto Maia's emphatically frontal images of ex-votos do Nordeste and indigenous featherwork.

**IMAGE 6 - Artes aplicadas: « Os vasos do barro de Elisabeth Nobling » and « Os tecidos de Clara Hartoch » *Habitat 1* (1950): 62-63. Photographs by Geraldo de Barros.**

**IMAGE 7 - « Ex-votos do Nordeste » *Habitat 1* (1950): 72-73. Photographs by Roberto Maia.**

By plucking popular crafted objects and modern design from their places of use, and by using modernist photography to emphasize formal qualities, these images imply an equivalence among various facets of Brazilian cultural production. No single type of cultural production was set apart for special treatment, and there was no clear chronology or geographical ordering to guide readers through the pages. Like the exhibition space of the MASP, *Habitat* juxtaposed disparate works in order to evade distinctions between high and low, modern and popular. Yet given the categorical slippage among these objects, how would the popular continue to be a viable category, distinct from applied arts—which are linked to industry—and from traditional craft—i.e., featherwork?

One strategy for maintaining the distinctness of the popular was to reaffirm links between the popular and the Brazilian land. The *Habitat* editorial that opening the inaugural issue in fact bypassed various possible beginnings for an account of Brazilian art—the history of Portuguese colonial architecture, the famed « French Mission » that initiated Brazil's francophilic modernity, or the modern masters of Brazilian painting—and instead focused on creators' relationship to the Brazilian land itself: « Partindo do fator paisagem cuja fisionomia vai sendo modificada pelos novos planos agrícolas e urbanísticos, o nosso interesse será voltado para o trabalho daqueles que com candura se exprimem através das artes populares »<sup>10</sup>. The invocation of the Brazilian landscape echoes a deterministic vision of climatological effects on human history that reaches back to social Darwinism. Such environmental determinism was prevalent in late-nineteenth century Brazilian art and literature, e.g., the inevitability baked into artistic and literary depictions such as Almeida Júnior's sun-wearied *caipiras* and the inhabitants of Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (Naves 2005). Yet the formal qualities of

10 Prefácio to *Habitat* 1 (1950), p. 1.

photography in *Habitat* extracted most—though not all—popular and regional forms of artistic production from their setting in favor of the decontextualized metamorphoses of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire*.

Instead, it was through architecture that the popular came back into focus. In the very first article in the first issue of *Habitat*, Lina Bo Bardi affirmed the centrality of the Brazilian landscape for popular artistic techniques, but extracted modern architecture from its landscape. In « Casas de Vilanova Artigas, » Lina Bo Bardi analyzed João Batista Vilanova Artigas's « arquitetura humana. » Unlike bourgeois fortress-houses, she wrote, Artigas' avowedly modern concrete houses linked interior and exterior, incorporated ceramic tile and « 'rotulas' arabes » that echoed colonial Portuguese precedents, and were formally responsive to the local climatological necessity of managing heavy tropical rainfall.<sup>11</sup> Here, Brazil's modern architecture absorbs popular forms developed from the Brazilian landscape. However, the images of Vilanova Artigas's houses barely give any indication of the setting, nor of any inhabitants. Similarly, in a photo essay on Baroque architectural decoration, modernist photographers Peter Scheier and Roberto Maia—as well as P. M. Bardi himself—contributed architectural details of flowers, vines, arabesques, and building details enmeshed in nearby plant life. Often cropped from their full settings, these photographs are notable for the absence of people. In contrast, in *Habitat* articles on popular architecture over the years 1950 through 1952, such as « Amazonas: o povo arquiteto, » « Por que o povo é arquiteto? », « A casa de 7 mil cruzeiros » at the periphery of São Paulo, and « Construir é viver » in the heart of the Amazon, images foregrounded many of these buildings' constructors and inhabitants. At times the photographs accompanying these articles on popular architecture even seem to directly quote

11 Lina Bo Bardi, « Casas de Vilanova Artigas. », *Habitat* 1 (1950), p. 2-16.

Almeida Júnior's compositional tropes: placing barefoot non-elite bodies before walls of rough wood plank or pau-a-pique construction. Additionally, the regionalized racialization of the popular is evident in displays of Black and Brown bodies as creators of popular architecture—in contrast to the absence of visible creators in most other *Habitat* articles.

**IMAGE 8 - « Amazonas: o povo arquiteto » *Habitat* 1 (1950): 68-71. Photographs by Roberto Maia.**

**IMAGE 9 - « Porque o povo é arquiteto » *Habitat* 3 (1951): 4-5. Photograph by Gregori Warchavchik.**

There is an obvious essentialism in this use of Black and Brown bodies to affirm to popular character of Brazilian architecture, but the emphasis on popular labor rather than leisure also points to new interpretations of the popular that came to the fore in the 1960s. Lina Bo Bardi is known, in fact for her later promotion of Brazilian popular arts in exhibitions such as « Bahia no Ibirapuera » (1959), « Nordeste » (1963), and « A mão do povo brasileiro » (1969). Broadly, in her architecture and exhibitions from the late-1950s onward, Lina Bo Bardi foregrounded raw materiality, simplicity of form, and accessibility to audiences beyond the typical museum-goer or vanguard architectural patron. Most accounts of Lina Bo Bardi's involvement with the popular emphasize her intellectual debt to Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, and his notion of a national-popular culture (Campagnol & Caffey 2015; Rubino 2002, 89-90). While Lina Bo Bardi's transition toward a Gramscian stance was strengthened by 1960s contact with Bahian intellectuals such as dramaturg Martim Gonçalves and filmmaker Glauber

Rocha, she began working through ideas of the popular through her late-1940s and 1950s design work at the early MASP and on the magazine *Habitat* (Stuchi 2007, 26). Trained as an architect in interwar Italy, Lina Bo Bardi had a firsthand view both on the rediscovery of regional vernacular architecture by Italian architects, and on fascist efforts to render « high culture » popular (Ghirardo 2013, 71-72). This is not to say that *Habitat* evinces a fascist project—though we should be aware of ideologies underlying the museum’s program (Anagnost 2019, 697-700)—but to remind us that desires to collapse borders between modern and popular are not necessarily progressive.

It was in this crucible, the high-handed effort of the MASP and *Habitat* to include the popular within the space of the modern, and to popularize the modern, that early tendrils of Lina Bo Bardi’s Gramscian stance took root. For, even in the racist foregrounding of Black and Brown bodies as markers of an authentic Brazilian popular, Lina Bo Bardi’s editorial choices enabled the creative labor of non-elites to become visible. Each Amazonian house beam raised, each discussion of « o povo » compelled, by their material conditions, to build, fed into her nascent understanding of « pré-artisanato. » For Lina Bo Bardi, objects created by Brazilians with little to no formal education displayed this « pré-artisanato, » a form of expressive creation distinct from both industrial production and from artisanship carried out by a distinct social class of craftsmen historically more prevalent in Western European nations (Bardi 1975-1976, 4-7). By the late-1960s, she would articulate this through the lens of popular architecture (Lima 2013, 120). Lina Bo Bardi arrived at her canonical exhibitions of popular arts in the late 1950s, then, by way of popular architecture:

A arquitetura contemporânea brasileira não provem da arquitetura dos Jesuítas, mas do ‘pau a pique’ do homem solitário, que

trabalhosamente cortara os galhos nas florestas, provém da casa do 'seringueiro', com seu soalho de troncos e o telhado de capim, é aludida, também ressonante, mas possui [sic] em sua resolução furiosa de fazer, uma soberbia e uma poesia do homem do sertão, que não conhece as grandes cidades da civilização e os museus, que não possui [sic] a herança de milênios, mas suas realizações—cuja concretização foi somente possível por esta sua soberbia esquiva—fazem deter o homem que vem de países de cultura antiga<sup>12</sup>.

Here, Lina Bo Bardi tells a quintessentially paulista story, of a frontiersman carving out civilization in the wilderness, through images of regional laboring bodies like the seringueiro of the Amazon or the homem do sertão. For Lina Bo Bardi, it is not through non-elites' leisure activities but through expressive acts of creation—forms of labor driven by necessity rather than commerce—that the Brazilian popular emerges.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The early years of *Habitat* demonstrate the Bardis' interest in using photographic aspects of the magazine to establish the capacious scope of what Brazilian art could be. Though the Bardis were more invested in displaying popular art rather than creating modern art rooted in the popular, their efforts mark a break with the previous era and a bridge to the following stage. MASP's museum displays and *Habitat's* magazine layouts often showed decontextualized art objects—including modern, popular, and historical artworks—photographed against « neutral » backgrounds, seeming to absorb

12 Lina Bo Bardi, « Bela criança. », *Habitat 2* (1951), p. 3.



popular art into the neutral spaces of the modern museum. However, *Habitat*'s coverage of contemporary popular construction, uniquely included images of people. Often visibly poorer, typically Afro-descendent or mixed race, people populate the pages of *Habitat* almost invariably as a way to link popular artisanship to lived experience in specific regions of Brazil. (The exceptions that prove the rule are photographs of urban art viewers, almost invariably white, who are shown taking part in museum events.) Even as the MASP sought to « popularize the Museum » (Bardi 1956, 104) among urban Brazilians—by using modern strategies of visual display to level the aesthetic differentiation among artworks from divergent cultural contexts and time periods—museum and magazine continued to single out Brazilian popular art through its rootedness in place and, often, images of nonwhite bodies.

For Lina Bo Bardi, the insufficiency of the modern museum led her to Salvador. During the 1960s, she created intertwined museums of popular art and modern art in shells of buildings from colonial Brazil, located in perhaps the most regional of Brazil's regions, Bahia. This was a period in which numerous artists involved themselves in the popular, often centered on specific regionally-rooted cultural expressions. For example, Hélio Oiticica evoked the socio-spatial performativity of Rio de Janeiro Carnival blocos with his 1960s *Parangolés*, and the informal constructions of that same city's favelas in his 1960s-70s *penetráveis* cabins (Oiticica 1967). Lygia Pape and Anna Maria Maiolino created works drawing upon the popular Northeastern *literatura de cordel* tradition: roughly-hewn black ink woodcuts on thin paper. Lina Bo Bardi was not a visual artist whose aesthetic practice incorporated popular artisanship or popular cultural forms, but a curator who made the visibility of artistic labor a focal point for her architecture and exhibition designs. Thinking beyond the space of the museum, she spoke in the early

1960s of her intent for the Museu de Arte Popular in Bahia to become a center for the documentation of popular art and for technical studies about the Northeast, aiming to understand « the passage from pre-artesanato to modern industry » (Lima 2005). Here again we are in that transitional gradient, with the popular located somewhere between the folkloric and the mass produced.

A final visual comparison points to another direction in which Lina Bo Bardi might have traveled. In the early 1950s, P. M. Bardi contributed his own photographs to selected issues of *Habitat* as well. For example, the « Fotografias » section in *Habitat 2* included Bardi's photograph of a large cement water pipe framing a scene of São Paulo's urban growth. The following page feature Bardi's modernist image of window glass and shadows—which seems to directly quote Geraldo de Barros—and several images by other photographers, including a photograph of a nude indigenous Brazilian women and baby with body paint leaning against the belly of an airplane, and an iron axé sculpture. It is difficult to know whether P. M. Bardi or Lina Bo Bardi composed this layout, which reflects a rather literal juxtaposition of formal qualities found in art from various *camadas*. What we do know about the following decades is that P. M. Bardi would to some extent retreat from the world, maintaining the MASP as an experimental museographical space set apart from politics. Lina Bo Bardi, on the other hand, would trace the emergence of a Brazilian popular in the pages of her own magazine.

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