# IAC/MASP, a Futurist School in São Paulo

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In the historiography of design, the schism between industrial design based on The American International Style and that grounded in the teachings of the European Bauhaus is well-known. It is therefore surprising that a school of industrial design founded in São Paulo in 1950 managed to marry these two conflicting approaches to design. The school in question was the IAC of MASP.

Pietro Maria Bardi, the man in charge of MASP, was its intellectual mentor and director. The notions on which the school based its activities followed a simple line of reasoning[1]: São Paulo was an industrial city, but its factory owners had no idea what design was, so they kept copying and rehashing old items and articles that dated back to a time of artisanal production. It was therefore essential to have an industrial design school that could train first-rate professionals to work with these businesspeople. Only then would Brazil have products befitting of its nascent industrialized society.

MASP was the perfect place for such an initiative. The museum had been founded upon an eloquent belief in the future, in the synthesis of the arts, *aggiornato* with an industrial city, whose potential patrons still nurtured a taste that urgently needed changing if they were to put their money into the kinds of initiative the country was sorely lacking[2]. For Bardi, that change of taste meant looking anew at their everyday surroundings, changing their curtains, their upholstery, and the furniture in their homes.

Pietro Maria Bardi and Lina Bo Bardi saw enormous pedagogical potential in the Museum's activities, in *Habitat* magazine, which they created, and in the IAC. In addition to forming a collection, during the post-war years the Museum ran a program that featured constant exhibitions by contemporary artists, including Alexander Calder, Max Bill, Le Corbusier and Saul Steinberg. There were didactic exhibitions too, like that on the history of the chair. Hardly surprisingly, still in the

1 Simple and naïve. Bardi spent a lifetime trying to figure out why his initiative failed to work. The discussion of this and the impermeability of the São Paulo business class lies beyond the scope of the present article, but these issues are covered in: LEON, Ethel. *IAC primeira escola de design do Brasil*. São Paulo: Blucher, to be published.

2 Assis Chateaubriand, founder of MASP, owner of *Diários Associados*, a powerful chain of newspapers and magazines. He strong-armed many members of the Brazilian elite into becoming patrons of the arts, using his media power to level veiled or open threats, and even resorting to blackmail. For more on this see: MORAIS, Fernando. *Chatô, o rei do Brasil: A vida de Assis Chateaubriand, um dos brasileiros mais poderosos do século XX*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994. See also Bardi's memoir: *Sodalício com Assis Chateaubriand*. São Paulo: MASP/SHARP, 1982.

Museum's first year, Bardi installed the Vitrine das Formas [Vitrine of Forms], an exhibition space that presented ancient Egyptian and Greek utensils alongside… an Olivetti typewriter (designed by Marcello Nizzoli), which was occasionally replaced by a Vigorelli sewing machine. The aim was to transform the taste of the São Paulo elite, priming it to serve as the driving force behind sociocultural transformations city and nationwide.[3]

*Habitat* magazine, for example, railed against the ugliness of São Paulo's urban furniture, bourgeois interior decoration, and commercial window displays. After all, there was no point in having a museum with permanent exhibits of Poussin, Tintoretto and Picasso if the elite went on sitting on Napoleonic thrones and entertaining in rooms in which eclectic upholsterers had been given free rein.

Industrial design was considered an important instrument in purging the Brazilian elite of its dubious, *passé* taste. The school was to align itself with the best and most recent on offer, and Bardi, in the articles he wrote and published in the newspapers of Diários Associados, never tired of stressing the museum's affiliation with the Bauhaus Institute in Dessau and its American heir, the Chicago Institute of Design, created and directed by the former Bauhauser Lazlo Moholy-Nagy.

This ennobling lineage achieved legendary status at the IAC. In building the institute's management team, Bardi's choice for president was the Ukrainian-Brazilian artist Lasar Segall, a widely recognized figure on the modest Brazilian art scene. Lasar Segall had visited the Bauhaus and corresponded with Wassily Kandinsky, but he had never studied at the school, either in Weimer or Dessau. However, the note announcing and explaining Segall's appointment endeavored to suggest otherwise:

> *not only for his merit as an artist, but also the experience he acquired at the first-ever school of industrial design, the famous Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, where Segall worked alongside the great renovators and researchers of the applied arts and architecture (Breuer, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius and others).* [4]

Similarly, the school's textiles teacher, the German Klara Hartoch, was presented as a former Bauhaus student, more specifically as a pupil of Anni Albers. However, while Anni Albers had been a student at the Bauhaus, she never taught there[5]. The work that came off the IAC's looms, operated by Hartoch, does reveal certain affinities with Anni Alber's style, with the same total rejection of ornamentation and a similar layout and weft. Bardi, however, pitched Hartoch as a product of the German school, just as he implied that Lasar Segall was once a Bauhauser.

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3 Many Italians with ties to MASP helped instil a design culture in São Paulo, including the architect Gian Carlo Palanti, a partner of Lina and Pietro Maria Bardi's in the Studio Palma, which built and sold modern furniture; Bramante Buffoni, the man in charge of Olivetti publications and the application of the company's corporate and visual identity in Brazil, and who co-produced the Olivetti catalogue with Flávio Motta. Buffoni designed the Olivetti typewriter in conjunction with Abrahão Sanovicz and Julio Katinsky, and created ceramic panels for various modern buildings in São Paulo; Joan Vila, the Italian poet who organized the didactic exhibitions; Tito Batini, author; Francesco Flora, art historian; Guido di Ruggero, philosophy historian; and the painter Gastone Novelli.

4 "No Museu de Arte. Instituto de arte Contemporânea. Professores que farão parte da Congregação", *Diário da Noite*, March 22, 1950.

5 The author consulted the archives for both the Weimar and Dessau schools and found no mention of Hartoch. However, she may have studied under a different name.

The Bauhaus was therefore more than just a reference, but rather something of a founding myth for Bardi and his initiative of opening a school of design in São Paulo, as was its American successor, the Institute of Design in Chicago, directed by Moholy-Nagy, to which Bardi often referred in his writings:

> *Then came the famous 'Bauhaus' of Gropius, Breuer and others, the school of industrial design that created countless new solutions so familiar to us today, such as the Wassily chair, steel furniture, etc.*
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> *Later, the Americans took up the torch and developed the Chicago Institute of Design, under Moholy-Nagy, a former Bauhaus teacher... All of these initiatives cannot be overlooked in Brazil, especially in São Paulo, a large industrial center. Today, art can no longer be seen as the preserve of a closed group. It must rise to and equal industry in transforming the global physiognomy.*[6]

However, it is clear that Bardi's real model was the Dessau Bauhaus under Gropius, the one raised to canonical status by the MoMA in New York, and that he had little truck with the expressionist Weimar period, much less the year the communist Hannes Meyer was in charge.

When the IAC was created in São Paulo, Gropius' Bauhaus Dessau had already been inducted into the canons by MoMA in an exhibition held in 1938. Since then Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, Josef Albers, Anni Albers and Mies van der Rohe were all already based in the USA. MoMA found in that period of the German school a set of ideas that sat coherently with the technical progress underway in the US and a cultured formal identity, one that clearly distinguished itself from the American International Style and its department-store hits.

Styling emerged at General Motors as a strategy for recycling industrial products in such a way as their novelty value made the competition look constantly outmoded[7]. In opposition, the heirs of the Bauhaus stuck to the view that an industrial product had to be redesigned or replaced altogether once technical obsolescence set in. For these, the market was neither a motor nor motive for change. The tourneys between the champions of either cause were bloody and the schism between them bordered on chemical purity.

Bauhaus Dessau/Gropius was the clear choice of MoMA, which cast off all the social-democratic undertones of 1920s Germany that echoed heavily in the International Style. However, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's Chicago school tried to

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6 "No Museu de arte. Instalação do Instituto de arte contemporanea.", *Diário de São Paulo,* March 8, 1950. Many of Bardi's handwritten articles catalogued in the MASP library were printed in newspapers belonging to Diários Associados. In some cases, Bardi's writings are veritable press releases, published in full.

7 In the 1920s, GM devised this strategy and it enabled the company to pull streets ahead of Ford, its main competitor. In producing its cars, GM ceased to focus exclusively on the engineering and began to introduce new models with design attributes inspired by Italian Futurism, such as the elongated wings and other streamline features suggestive of speed. Over the years that followed, many of the formal characteristics of GM cars migrated to other industries, especially consumer goods. In addition to streamline aesthetics, greater store was put on command panels and long-drop forms. For more on the adoption of styling and its acceptance on the US market prior to the 1920s Depression, see: David Gartman's article "Harley Earl and the Art and Color Section: The Birth of Styling at General Motors", in DOORDAN, Dennis P. (org.) *Design History an Anthology.* Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1995, pp.122-144.

retain its Bauhausian philosophy. During the eight years he directed the Design Institute, he resisted all pressures to bend the school to the market's will. His meeting with the philosopher John Dewey in the US served only to reinforce this pedagogical choice, incompatible with any professionalizing or vocational approach.[8] For Moholy-Nagy, the role of the school was to mold citizens who were open to the new world of technical possibilities, uncorrupted by capitalism and aware of their humanity.

Moholy-Nagy died in 1946, shortly after participating in a debate at MoMA in New York alongside the curator of the design department Edgar Kaufmann Jr. and the foremost designers on the US scene at the time, Raymond Loewy and Walter Teague. At this debate, Loewy and Teague defended design as a practice whose goal was to help manufacturers sell their products, while Moholy-Nagy and Kaufmann Jr. argued for its ethical foundation, independent of industry.

MASP opened in 1947, when the Institute of Design was under the directorship of an heir to Moholy-Nagy, the designer Serge Chermayeff, recommended for the job by Gropius. In 1949, thanks to negotiations brokered by the industrialist Walter Paepcke[9], the institute became affiliated with the Illinois Institute of Technology, where Mies Van der Rohe was in charge of the school of architecture. Chermayeff resigned in 1951, and the school was left director-less until 1955, with the appointment of Jay Doblin, a designer and former collaborator of Raymond Loewy. It was a choice that displeased Gropius and many of the school's teachers and students.[10]

The decision to set up the IAC, to transform it into a school of industrial design[11], to watch its creation, crisis and closure unfold without any ties to the debate going on in Chicago, reproduced, in a sense, some of the smoldering polemics of the Bauhaus over its 13-year existence.

Though it declared its lineage from Bauhaus Dessau and the Chicago Institute of Design, the North American designers accused of styling were not demonized at the IAC. Quite the contrary. Bardi was an admirer of Raymond Loewy and presented some of the products created by the Franco-American's studio, such as the Studebaker car, in his classes.[12]

The IAC brokered a sort of truce between these conflicting visions by simulta-

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8 On this, see: FINDELI, Alain. "Moholy-Nagy's Design Pedagogy in Chicago (1937-1946)."' In: *The Idea of Design: A Design Issues Reader.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995, pp. 29-55.

9 Walter Paepcke was director-president of the Container Corporation of America (CCA), a packaging manufacturer. He established business relationships and friendships with many modern artists, such as Fernand Léger, Walter Gropius and Herbert Bayer, thanks to introductions made by Moholy-Nagy. Gropius and Bayer became consultants to CCA. Gropius designed the company's facilities in Columbia and North Carolina, and was invited to discuss the urban project at Aspen, Colorado, which Paepcke was developing as a ski resort and conference center (venue for the Design and Technology Conferences, or TEDS).

10 In his *The Struggle for Utopia,* Victor Margolin says that the approximation between Moholy-Nagy's school and the IIT was hindered by soured relations between Moholy-Nagy and Mies Van der Rohe, who taught at the IIT.

11 Bardi originally conceived of the IAC as a school for training art historians.

12 In Pietro Maria Bardi's *Excursão ao território do design* (São Paulo: Sudameris, 1986, p.104), Raymond Loewy is mentioned as a corporate identity designer.

neously exalting high modernism, fed by the domestication or Americanization of Bauhaus Dessau, and its sworn enemies, the North American designer/consultants. Raymond Loewy, whose assertion that "ugliness doesn't sell" resounded like blasphemy in a temple to the Bauhausers, was a sort of modern hero at the IAC.

## So how are we to understand this dual affiliation?

Without doubt, the fact that the IAC was established inside MASP, free from institutional or corporate pressures, might explain why the path was free for such reconciliation. In Germany, Bauhaus was scrutinized by the governments of Weimar and Dessau. In Chicago, Walter Paepcke, the powerful owner of the Container Corporation of America, followed the school's every step. He understood design as a business tool, and he expected the Institute of design to do the same.

No such pressures were brought to bear on the São Paulo institute. Bardi believed that both the city and its industries would applaud the Museum's school and ensure its success. He was mistaken. He even found it hard to arrange internships for IAC students at São Paulo businesses[13]. One of the few internships the school managed to arrange, for Alexandre Wollner, was at the São Paulo branch of Raymond Loewy's studio, which opened in 1949, buoyed by a similar misconception to Bardi's that the local manufacturers would be queuing up to hire the services of the industrial designer who had made the cover of *Time* magazine that same year.[14]

This reconciliation of the Bauhaus and the stylist strands was neither determined nor suggested by any external agent, but was simply part of Bardi's mindset, most probably a throwback to his Italian modernist background, the legacy of Futurism. His anti-classicism, a position he assumed in defense of Italy's rationalist and fascist architecture, was renewed in Brazil. Here, in place of Mussolini there was Assis Chateaubriand, an authoritarian boss, both violent and modernizing. Instead of Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Terragni we had academics and a young generation of modern architects in dialogue with Le Corbusier.

What we did not have, however, was a Giò Ponti of product design, capable of creating a coffee machine aligned with futurist expression, with its huge valves and metallic pistons, created like some musical instrument invented for a noise concert by Luigi Russolo. The same Giò Ponti with whom Lina had worked with in Milan, that incarnated the persona of the architect who designed everything from "spoons to entire cities"; the same Ponti who did the editorial design for *Domus* and costumes and stage designs for the theater.

The intellectual and political lineage of Pietro Maria and Lina Bo Bardi is enough in itself to explain the IAC. Besides, it was the first school of industrial

13 The agreements the IAC sealed with Lanifício Fileppo and Cristais Prado concerned, respectively, a logo and poster, with nothing to do with the factory floor as such.

14 Not only did this not happen, but the branch was soon closed down. The Californian engineer Charles Bosworth, who had moved to Brazil to direct the outfit, stayed here until his death, though working in real estate rather than industrial design.

design in Brazil, so there were no models to adopt or reject. Furthermore, back in Italy, those who worked for the industrialists were architects, artists, engineers or autodidacts, and there were no design schools there either. The IAC formalized the body of knowledge being applied by the design departments of the Italian companies spearheading the Boot's industrial 'renaissance' in the production of individual/family-oriented consumer goods, a renaissance that would receive MoMA's blessing[15] and become something of a banner for individual freedoms in the Cold War world. [16]

MASP's IAC ran a considerable curriculum that includes introductions to architecture and botany[17], textile workshops, model-building, classes in painting and engraving, access to photography laboratories, graphic languages, composition, sociology and materials, in short, a program that was similar to that offered by the Chicago Institute. The teaching staff included such figures as Bardi himself, Lina Bo, Jacob Ruchti, Oswaldo Bratke, Roberto Sambonet, Flávio Motta, Leopold Haar, Roger Bastide among others. As at the Bauhaus, the students were handpicked and received a basic course.

However, anyone who thinks the IAC actually followed the doctrines of the schools Bardi claimed to be emulating is quite mistaken. Pervaded by the museum's general activities, the institute allowed its students and staff to create the decoration for artists' balls and produce prints for fabrics with Brazilian motifs based on the work of Luisa Sambonet. Roberto Sambonet, the drawing teacher at the institute, designed a number of dresses and gowns, one of which was inspired by Mondrian[18], as part of the Museum's attempt to create a Brazilian fashion. This concern with fashion, which would have been nothing strange to the Italian futurists and modernists, found welcoming ground at MASP, whose director even organized a Christian Dior fashion show (Figs. 1-2).

IAC lasted under three years. Only two classes graduated, and these were lumped together. Despite its brief existence, the school was decisive for the professionals who attended it, and in whose formation it played an important role: Antonio Maluf, Ludovico Martino, Emilie Chamie, Estella Aronis, Alexandre Wollner, Maurício Nogueira Lima and Irene Ruchti, among others.

Up until his death, Pietro Maria Bardi's articles and writings often reiterated his desire to create a school of industrial design in São Paulo. And in these texts he frequently tried to explain the IAC's failure. In a fast-metropolizing São Paulo celebrating its fourth centenary, there was still no place for autonomous industrial design, or a school to produce it.

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15 The Olivetti exhibition at MoMA took place in 1953. The catalogue lauded the company's excellent taste.

16 For more on Italian design in the years after World War II and its role during the Cold War, see: SPARKE, Penny. *Italian Design, from 1870 to the present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988.

17 In fact, Mansueto Koscinsky, agronomist at Horto Florestal, taught classes on wood so that the school's future designers would have a better knowledge of what was their primary raw material.

18 Many years later, during the turbulent 1960s, the clothes designer Yves Saint Laurent proposed something similar.

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**Fig. 1** *Fashion model wearing raffia dress. Biblioteca e Centro de Documentação – MASP.*

**Fig. 2** *Fashion models of Dior fashion show, sided by Pietro Maria Bardi and Lina Bobardi. Biblioteca e Centro de Documentação – MASP.*