

CULTURA AND THE COUNSEL OF ROBERTO BURLE MARX

SEAVITT NORDENSON, CATHERINE

The City College of New York, Spitzer School of Architecture, Program in Landscape Architecture
141 Convent Avenue, Room 2M24A, New York, NY 10065, cseavitt@seavitt.com

1 ABSTRACT

The Brazilian Conselho Federal de Cultura (Federal Council of Culture) was created by governmental decree in November 1966, two years after the 1964 military coup initiated a right-wing dictatorship that would last twenty-one years. The twenty-four counselors had dissimilar allegiances and motivations, but they all shared an interest in the national projection of Brazilian culture. Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994), now widely considered Latin America's most significant modernist landscape architect, was an appointed counselor, serving alongside other well-known cultural figures.

This paper examines Burle Marx's written opinions from 1967 until 1971, delivered to the President of the Republic and published in the Council's journal, Cultura. His opinions address such issues as deforestation, the establishment of national parks, the place of commemorative sculpture in public parks, and the unique history of the Brazilian landscape. A close reading of these texts, seen in the contemporaneous cultural context of Brazil, provides new insight into Burle Marx's earlier design work and elucidates a little-known but extremely important moment in the trajectory of his oeuvre, from prolific designer to prescient counselor

Many of Burle Marx's landscape projects prior to the period of the military dictatorship are public parks, ranging in scale from the small town squares of Recife to the large parks executed in Pampulha, Araxá, and Rio de Janeiro. After the military coup of 1964, Burle Marx clearly considered his position as Counselor as an equally important cultural project, for it provided a platform from which to develop and promote his ideas of the Brazilian landscape, its relationship to the public realm, and its protection and conservation, even in a milieu in which critical speech acts were restricted.

1.1 Keywords

Roberto Burle Marx, Brazil, military dictatorship, culture, deforestation