

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dis/Solution: Lina Bo Bardi's Museu de Arte de São Paulo

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The year 2014 marked the centenary of the birth of Roman-born Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi. Among the best known of Lina's many contributions to Brazilian modernism is Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP). Begun in 1957 and opened in 1968, MASP flouted European museological and museographical conventions, dissolving structural, temporal and hierarchical boundaries. Lina's expressive architectonic forms and revolutionary exhibition scheme allowed the works in the MASP collection to literally stand on their own as objects liberated completely from chronological, connoisseurial and scholarly classification systems. Lina designed MASP to provoke 'reactions of curiosity and investigation' by redefining notions of space and form within and beyond the context of the museum as mausoleum, archive and treasury. This collaborative analysis examines the philosophical, theoretical, practical and formal elements of what John Cage purportedly characterized as 'the architecture of freedom'. Toward that end, this article situates MASP and its collections within broader historical discourses of museum practice to reveal the transgressive genius of Lina's architectural and museal gestures. We conclude with a discussion of current debates surrounding the conventionalization of MASP's exhibition protocols, considered in the contexts of conservation and proposed changes to the structure and its immediate urban setting.

Keywords: Brazil; Lina Bo Bardi; Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP); museum architecture; museology; museography

Introduction

2014 marked the centenary of the birth of Roman-born Brazilian architect Achillina 'Lina' di Enrico Bo Bardi (1914–1992). Recent exhibitions dedicated to Lina's work have returned the northern hemisphere's attention to the transgressive genius that defined her vision. Those exhibitions include '*Lina Bo Bardi: Together*', 11 September–30 November 2012 at the British Council Gallery in London and 29 September–27 October at the Swiss Architecture Museum in Basel; '*Lina Bo Bardi: The Didactic Room*', part of '*Time Machines Reloaded*', 26 February–11 April 2012 at Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; and '*Lina Bo Bardi: The Insides Are on the Outside*', curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, staged in São Paulo at Lina's Glass House and at SESC Pompeia, from September 2012–May 2013. Among the best known of Lina's many contributions to Brazilian modernism is Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP). Begun in 1957 and opened in 1968, MASP flouted European museological and museographical conventions by dissolving structural, temporal and hierarchical boundaries. Lina's expressive architectonic forms and revolutionary exhibition schemes allowed the works in the MASP collection

to literally stand on their own as objects liberated completely from chronological, connoisseurial and scholarly classification systems.

This collaborative analysis interrogates the intersections and interstices between MASP as strategy and the objects within as experienced through what Lina characterized as 'reactions of curiosity and investigation' aroused by the fully realized desire for affective freedom and the proto-decolonialist 'conquest of nothing'. By examining the philosophical, theoretical, practical and formal elements of what John Cage purportedly characterized as 'the architecture of freedom', this paper situates the museum and its collections within broader historical discourses of museum practice to reveal the degrees to which Lina's visionary approach redefined notions of space and form within and beyond the context of the museum as mausoleum, archive and treasury (Bo Bardi 1990: 105). We conclude with a discussion in which the authors interrogate current debates regarding the recent conventionalization of MASP's exhibition protocols within the broader context of proposed changes to MASP and its immediate urban setting.

The Origins of MASP

In 1947 Roman-born architect Lina Bo Bardi traveled with her husband, the Italian gallerist, art critic and promoter Pietro Maria Bardi to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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Bardi brought to Brazil his personal collection of art, an exhibition of which was attended by press magnate Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Melo. Assis Chateaubriand invited Bardi to help create an art museum and to offer guidance in amassing a collection of European and Brazilian works to exhibit in the museum. Assis Chateaubriand had purchased a small number of Italian Renaissance works and – with money donated by Brazil's business elites – sent Bardi back to Europe to purchase enough additional works to form the basis of a permanent collection for the Brazilian museum to be founded in either Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo (Bardi 1992: 10–14; Lima 2010). According to Lina, 'I much preferred Rio, but the money was in São Paulo. I told Pietro that I wanted to stay, that I here felt once again the hope that I experienced at night during the war. Thus we remained in Brazil' (Ferraz 1994: 12). The private, non-profit Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) opened its exhibition space in October of 1947 in a one thousand square-meter room in an existing building at 7 de Abril Street in downtown São Paulo, location of the headquarters of the *Diários Associados* (Associated Press), owned by Assis Chateaubriand. Lina developed the museological and museographical strategies for the museum.

Lina's curatorial vision for the first incarnation of MASP challenged the configuration of a museum as an 'intellectual mausoleum,' with its suffocating 'cupolas and monumental staircases'. Lina envisioned instead a space within which to provide an atmosphere, a conduit intended to create in the visitor a state of mental preparedness for understanding the work of art: '...in this sense no distinction is made between an old or a modern work of art. With the same objective, the work of art is not located following a chronological criterion but it is presented almost deliberately so as to produce shock, to awaken reactions of curiosity and investigation' (Ferraz 1994: 46). In the Abril Street location the paintings were detached from the walls, mounted on a neutral background, and held by metal pipes fixed on the ceiling and floor (**Figure 1**). 'The criteria governing the internal architecture of the museum were restricted to solutions of "flexibility", to the possibility of transforming the ambience, together with strict economy that is in keeping with our times. (...) Picture frames were also eliminated (when they were not authentic to their times) and replaced with neutral bands' (Ferraz 1994: 46).

According to Lina,

...[E]vocative refinements and contours were abandoned and antique artworks are not displayed on velvet, as many museological experts still advised, or on a type of fabric appropriate to their time, but boldly placed on a neutral background. Modern artworks were similarly standardized so they were situated in such a way as to not put them in relief before the viewer, but to put them in the viewer's sight. It is not said, therefore, "one must admire it [because] it's a Rembrandt", but rather it leaves to the viewer a pure and unpretentious observation.... Thus the ancient artworks ended up finding a new



Figure 1: Interior, MASP Abril Street (photograph MASP collection).

life, next to the modern, validating their relevance in the contemporary world (Bo Bardi 1950: 17).

The idea for a new kind of museum had first manifested earlier in that same year, in Lina's work for an art museum in Rio de Janeiro for which she had articulated similar aspirations:

'The new museums should open their doors, and let pure air and new light in (...) to establish contact between past life and the present. In this sense the new museums, having understood their function in the contemporary world, have found the means through which to exert it, and are farther ahead than the most progressive of educational institutions' (Ferraz 1994: 43).

Lina envisioned a space with a didactic function, but absent of the elitism that pervaded museums as cultural institutions.

To produce a Brazilian vision rooted in the practices of the contemporary European avant-garde, Lina drew inspiration from the 'advances and changes promoted by Italian Rationalism in the 1930s', drawing directly from Franco Albini's 1941 innovations for the *Galleria Brera* in Milan, and in the process indirectly reinterpreting Edoardo Persico and Marcello Nizzoli's pioneering *Salé delle Medaglie d'Oro* from 1934 (**Figure 2**, **Figure 3**). By moving the paintings out into the exhibition space, Lina invoked her Italian colleagues, rejecting the walls as a mechanism for exalting space and content (Carrilho 2003; Zevi 1996: 36). (The panel-and-rod system had a practical function, as well: the stucco on the walls was slow to dry, so placing the paintings on panels away from the walls protected the stucco surfaces while also protecting the paintings from the fresh stucco.) By mixing works ancient and modern, representational and abstract, European and Brazilian, 'folk' and 'fine', Lina neutralized the hierarchical formulae that defined contemporary museum practice. Writing in the 2 July 1950 issue of *Diário de Notícias*, journalist Geraldo Ferraz described the renovation of 7 de Abril as 'a rational architectural achievement that reveals, in its design, a remarkable capacity to make



Figure 2: Franco Albini, Pinacoteca di Brera (Brera Art Gallery). *Mostra Scipione e del Bianco e Nero* (Scipione & Black and White Exhibition), Milan, 1941 (photograph Fondazione Franco Albini collection).

elastic the occupied rigid space, and thus subordinating to it the various departments necessary to the Art Museum'. The collaboration between Lina Bo Bardi as architect and Pietro Maria Bardi as museum director proved more than satisfactory, not only for the museum and its administration, but for the public and critics as well (Miyoshi 2011: 47, 51–53).

The New MASP

I was looking for simple architecture, one that could communicate that which in the past was known as 'monumental', that is, in the sense of the 'collective', of 'civic dignity' (Ferraz 1994: 100).

Between 1953 and 1957, the main collection of MASP toured France, Germany, Belgium, England, Italy and the United States. In the last year of the tour, Lina completed the initial proposal for a purpose-built structure to house the collection. The location chosen for the permanent home of the MASP collection was a parcel of land bounded by a major thoroughfare on one side (Avenida Paulista), a public park and forested valley on another, and Avenida 9 de Julho, which runs through a tunnel before intersecting Avenida Paulista (**Figure 4**). The acreage donated by Joaquim Eugênio de Lima – the engineer whose contracting company built Avenida Paulista – included a belvedere that offered park visitors a view of the city. The full MASP proposal appeared in 1958, with some modifications, including the introduction of glass walls and a seventy-meter span, introduced over the next two years. Construction began in 1960 and MASP opened with a grand public ceremony in 1968 (**Figure 5**).

One of the many distinguishing features of the structure is its span, at the time of its construction the largest in the world.

I'm ashamed to say that the São Paulo Art Museum has the largest span in the world! It is eighty meters in length. I never wanted to make the largest span

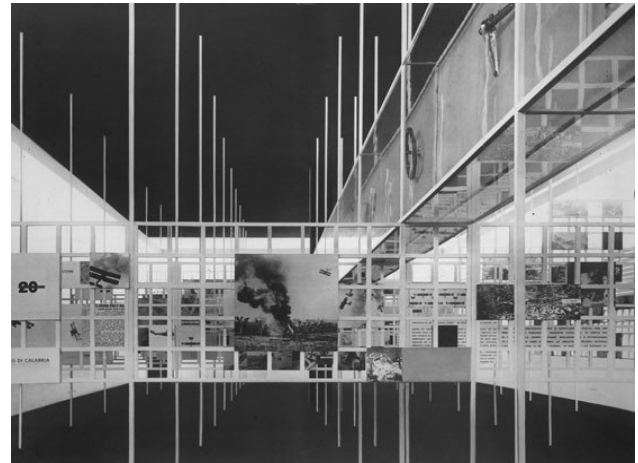


Figure 3: Edoardo Persico and Marcello Nizzoli, *Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro* (Gold Medals Room), *Mostra dell'Aeronautica* (Aeronautics Exhibition), Milan, 1934 (RIBA Photographs Collection).

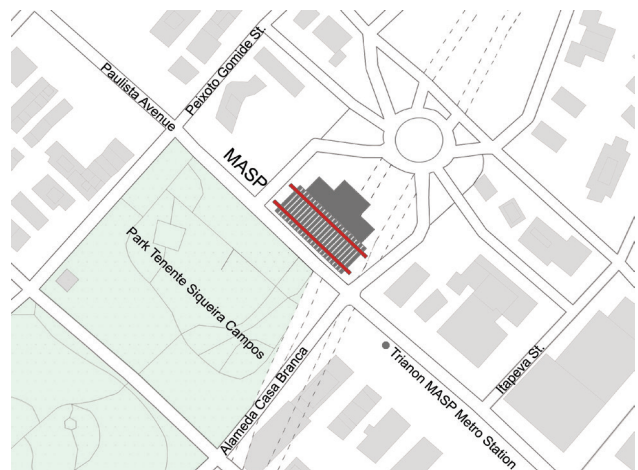


Figure 4: Map of MASP location, São Paulo, Brazil (illustration by Zhouzhou Su).

in the world, but there was the land donation that imposed it as a condition for its use the maintenance of the belvedere overlooking São Paulo. If I had constructed a building with columns and eliminated the belvedere, the land would return to the heirs (Ferraz 1994: 174).

The span was a product of Lina's realization that the challenges presented by 'no columns, seventy meters of light, [and] 8 meters of ceiling height' could only be solved with pre-stressed concrete. Lina selected pre-stressed concrete and solicited the pro bono participation of engineer José Carlos Figueiredo Ferraz. Once the administrative and funding issues were resolved, the construction contractor began work (Ferraz 1994: 125).

Immediately after submitting the MASP proposal, Lina traveled to the northeast of Brazil to design the Modern Art Museum of Bahia in Salvador (Zollinger 2014). While spending time away from the elite circles of São Paulo, Lina rededicated herself to the values of simplicity and accessibility. Drawing upon her time in Salvador, Lina also wrote extensively about the relationships between



Figure 5: MASP building from Paulista Avenue (photograph by the author).

architecture and culture, with an emphasis on the folk and the local rather than the more rarefied and esoteric issues associated with mid-century Modernism. As Lina characterized it, ‘by means of a popular experiment I arrived at what might be called Poor Architecture. ...I feel that in the São Paulo Art Museum I eliminated all the cultural snobbery so dearly beloved by the intellectuals (and today’s architects), opting for direct, raw solutions’ (Ferraz 1994: 100). Lina’s new architecture was poor not because of its use of inexpensive local materials or low quality, but poor because of its simplicity, clarity and lack of pretense. One might reasonably compare Lina’s ‘poor architecture’ to the Arte Povera movement that emerged in Italy in 1967, a year before MASP opened its doors on Avenida Paulista. According to the Genoese art critic Germano Celant, who coined the name Arte Povera, participants in the movement sought to eliminate the ‘dichotomy between art and life’ (Celant 1967: 3). Though distinctive, Lina’s decision to levitate MASP to allow for an unobstructed view of the city from the park was neither a matter of artistic choice (she had to preserve the view) nor an idea generated specifically for the São Paulo site. The concept of a box-like building suspended from the ground by reinforced concrete C-beams was first proposed in her 1951 design for a ‘Museum on the Seashore’ in the coastal city of São Vicente in São Paulo state (Ferraz 1994: 90). This museum (never built) was conceived as a box enclosed on the three sides, with the façade facing the ocean covered with glass. Ultimately, Lina abandoned her plan to translate the São Vicente design into a plan for MASP because of its repetitive disruption of the belvedere (Oliveira 2006: 262).

Preparatory studies for MASP demonstrate that Lina’s earliest vision of the suspended box made no provision for transparency. Instead, Lina conceived the space as a box with opaque sides (with or without a Corbusian ribbon window on the first floor, depending upon the stage of conceptualization) and only settled on the glass façades with light sheds later in the process. Once transparency (exterior and interior) had asserted itself at MASP, it assumed a determinative role in the formal

and philosophical content of the structure, the site and the exhibition scheme for the paintings in the collection (Oliveira 2006: 327; Ferraz 1994: 101). Lina had already explored transparency as a concept in her own house, Casa de Vidro (Glass House). Pietro, too, preferred the potency of glass as a material, praising it as one of the most perfect symbols of modernity; its use at MASP situated the structure within the architectural tradition first established by the Bauhaus in Germany (Miyoshi 2011: 81). Conceived as a free plan, the building divided into four registers: the spaces located beneath Avenida Paulista, the street level and the two floors of the upper level. The lower level comprised a civic hall with two auditoriums, library, restaurant and storage. The superior part of the building incorporated two levels, with five meters of lateral cantilevered space extending out over Avenida Paulista on the one side and in the direction of Anhangabaú Valley on the other. The first above-ground floor housed administration, storage and an area for temporary exhibitions. The second floor was dedicated entirely to the pinacoteca. At the street level, a plaza opened beneath the entire length of the building, with the base of the first floor serving as a sort of ceiling for the plaza.

When American avant-garde poet and musician John Cage arrived in São Paulo for the eighteenth Bienal in 1985, he asked the driver to stop the car in front of MASP. Exiting the car, Cage walked from one side of the belvedere to the other, raised his arms and exclaimed: ‘It is an architecture of freedom!’ (Bo Bardi 1990: 105). Having grown accustomed to receiving praise for ‘the world’s largest free span’, Lina welcomed Cage’s characterization, which communicated ‘what I meant when I designed MASP: the museum was a “nothing, a search for freedom, the elimination of obstacles, the ability to be free”’ (Bo Bardi 2009: 16; Bo Bardi 1952d). In Italy, the crushing weight of Antiquity and the Renaissance set limits and preconditions on modern architecture that simply did not exist in São Paulo. In Brazil, Lina ‘had the freedom to build a completely new building’ (Anelli 2009b: 104). Anelli notes that Lina’s design for MASP was ‘far from being a formalistic whim of the author[;] the glass façades of MASP expand the space of the pinacoteca to the city. The transparent skin dissolves the false boundaries between high/fine art and daily life, awakening in the uninitiated viewer “a natural consciousness”’. MASP thus articulated Lina’s belief that ‘to acquire consciousness is to politicize oneself’ (Anelli 2009b: 104; Bo Bardi 1970). MASP was the most fully realized and thus the most potent of Lina’s built manifesti: a call to arms for the Paulistano masses to wrench art from its elitist, funerary associations to connect to art through the clear, free, natural light of daily life.

The Exhibition Scheme for MASP in Context

‘...a painting is born in a free space—that is on an easel—its original state can best be evoked when exhibited on tempered plate glass fixed on a concrete base, rather than against an opaque wall’ (LaFarge 1978: 163).



Figure 6: Lina with one of the glass panel installations (photograph Lew Parrella, 1967, Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, São Paulo, Brazil collection. All rights reserved).



Figure 7: View of the pinacoteca (photograph Paolo Gasperini, 1968, Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, São Paulo, Brazil collection. All rights reserved).

Lina's hovering pinacoteca installation for MASP echoes the hover of the building itself, affording the interior space of the structure a substantive rather than adjective property. This is the space of neither/nor, of liminality, of becoming, of transition, of dissolution, of absence, of suspension, of the pause, of silence, of the void. Through the execution of Lina's vision, the exhibition space took on a sensory quality comparable to John Cage's *4' 33"*, performed by a full orchestra as four minutes and thirty-three seconds of complete silence (Oliveira 2006: 259). In Cage's three movements of instrumental and vocal silence, the random, ambient noise of the music hall and its occupants serve as content, with each performance and each recording of the work differing dramatically from all others. Lina's choice to affix the paintings and works on paper in the MASP collection to glass easels with concrete bases rejects the institutionally sanctioned (and ever-contentious) dialogue between painting and wall, replacing the artificial and superficial dialogue with a series of glancing encounters with multiple works simultaneously occupying the viewers' peripheral visual fields and with the other viewers moving behind and between the glass easel to activate the space among the levitating products of artistic labor (**Figure 6, Figure 7**).

In formal terms, each easel comprised four components: a cast concrete base (40 × 40 cm) supporting a 16 mm tempered glass panel with four holes, to which was secured a single painting. As would be the case if the works were hung on a wall, viewers had full access to the 'content side'—the obverse in the case of Lina's glass easel. On the reverse side of the support appeared labels, the smallest of which approximated conventional museum wall text panels, the largest roughly matching the dimensions of the object displayed. At their most spare, the labels identified the artist, title, medium and dimensions of the work. Some labels of this size allowed the viewer to see most of the back side of the work. More text-intensive labels, which included explanatory 'reproductions, engravings, maps, graphics and documents', completely obscured the backs of some works (LaFarge 1978: 163). Lina expressed confidence that her 'design of a panel-easel in the MASP

art gallery is an important contribution to international museum management'. To quantify her success, Lina cited the ratio of the thousands of visitors who visited MASP each weekend to the 'dozen complaints' she had received about the exhibition scheme (Ferraz 1994: 100).

Lina arranged the glass easels in the MASP second-floor exhibition room in an irregular grid pattern, all facing toward the entrance to the space with each attached work presented at 'eye level' so that the viewer could always see multiple objects placed at varying distances. However, no viewpoint allowed an MASP visitor to see all of the works at once; nor did any position permit the viewer to see only one of the paintings. As Shuman Basar notes, 'the glass supports disappeared at a distance, giving the impression that the paintings were hovering in magical, liberated suspense: an orchestration of dogged rationality bordering on the (poetically) pathological' (Basar 2005: 100). The resulting assemblage reads as a single work of art, the whole of which could only be experienced by moving through and around the individual components. And just as viewers at the Philadelphia Museum of Art look through Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23) to see other viewers on the other side of the work (and thus experience the intimate disorientation of a chance encounter), each visit to MASP would have emerged as a different permutation of chance elements (Veikos 2006).

Lina and Pietro chose the presentation sequences for each of the rows of paintings; the intent was an emphatic 'leveling' of the objects. This was achieved by rejecting such conventions as chronology, attribution, artistic movement, artist oeuvre, national identity, medium, size, market value, art-historical significance and geographical origin. The MASP installation made no distinctions between Brazilian vanguard painter Flávio Rezende de Carvalho's *Sleeping Nude* (1932), Pierre-August Renoir's *Pink and Blue* (1881) and van Gogh's *Schoolboy* (1888). Lina's 'crystal easels' created a perception of simultaneity across the movements and periods represented by collection, and an unusually free course of reception for the

visitor (Anelli 2009b). With her carefully scattered glass stele, Lina disfigured time and deranged space, insinuating the art of the past into an 'eternal present,' concretizing André Malraux's 'imaginary museum' in one grand, wild, fanciful provocation (Malraux 1965; Comas 2009: 168).

Situated against historical conventions of academy, gallery and museum display practices, the audacity of Lina's museological intervention at MASP becomes clear. Until the late nineteenth century most collectors, dealers, gallery owners and curators displayed paintings floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall and frame-to-frame. Johann Zoffany's *Tribuna of the Uffizi* (c. 1775), François-Joseph Heim's *Charles V Distributing Awards to the Artists at the Close of the Salon of 1824*, and George Scharf's 1828 *Exhibition at the Royal Academy* illustrate the practice in Italy, France and England during the period in which European art patronage expanded well beyond church and state (Figure 8). In London the practice of exhibiting one work per wall space first appeared in the one-man show mounted in a room at 28 Haymarket by the American-born painter John Singleton Copley in May of 1784, but the practice did not 'catch on' among other artists and institutions (Saunders 1990; Neff and Weber 2013). The most influential permanent break with the frame-to-frame tradition occurred on 1 May 1877, when London's Grosvenor Gallery opened its doors to the public, having hung the paintings with 'broad spaces' between, purportedly at the insistence of the painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler (New York Times 28 April 1877). Some historians attribute to Whistler Grosvenor Gallery owner Lindsay Coutts's decision to allow the pictures more space than was, at that time, the norm:

'Whistler's influence has been...marked in picture galleries. When he began to exhibit, galleries were decorated anyhow and pictures hung as close as they could be fitted from floor to ceiling, artists caring little how they were hung so long as their work was on the walls. ... "A beautiful picture should be shown beautifully," he said; "therefore it must be hung so it can be seen, with plenty of wall-space round it..."' (Pennell and Pennell 1921: 304).

The approach accomplished two objectives: first, refining the visual encounter with the paintings by allowing the viewer to engage with each as a discrete gesture of creative expression without the distractions of surrounding works; and second, the elimination of the hierarchical organization that placed the most prominent painters at the center of each wall and – in the case of London's Royal Academy – above or below 'the line' that indicated their esteem (by the members of the hanging committee, at least) and thus their value (Solkin 2001).

Despite the shift occasioned by the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition scheme, the Royal Academy continued to display paintings frame-to-frame until well after its move from Somerset House to Burlington House in 1868 (Figure 9). Writing in 1892, a contributor to *The British*



Figure 8: François-Joseph Heim' *Charles V Distributing Awards to the Artists at the Close of the Salon of 1824* (1825) oil on canvas, 173 × 256 cm. Louvre, Paris.



Figure 9: William Powell Frith, *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* (1883) oil on canvas, 23 5/8 × 44 7/8 in. Royal Academy of Art, London.

Architect reported that Sir James D. Linton, 'president of two art institutions' had finally concluded that such 'spacing would be the system of the future' (Davison 1892: 149). In addition to spacing, the Grosvenor Gallery also instituted the practice of grouping works by artist (rather than by hierarchical arrangement) and introduced electric light into the exhibition space for the first time, altering the appearance of works that had been produced in naturally lit artists' studios.

Lina introduced the display system at MASP in direct contradiction of the practices that predominated among all art exhibitions well into the twenty-first century. Almost all art exhibition venues had adopted the practice of separating and spacing works—a practice that continues to predominate in the twenty-first century. At MASP, just as the glass easels democratized the viewing space, the natural light that flooded into the pinacoteca treated equally the paintings that were produced before the advent of electric light and those that were produced with an incandescent bulb illuminating the production space.

In the mind of the 'jealous conservative with his old-fashioned, academic beliefs', the exhibition scheme at MASP was an act tantamount to desecration. Pietro extolled Lina's 'futuristic background and visionary ideas', explaining that the revolutionary approach to the display

of the paintings was the only option for a museum that 'belongs to the people' (LaFarge 1978: 9; Oliveira 2006: 276; Bo Bardi 1970). Through MASP Lina clarified a number of the aesthetic, curatorial and political impulses that informed her work as architect, artist and activist. As a member of the Communist Party and an adherent to the theoretical and critical positions of Antonio Gramsci, Lina held in marked disdain monarchical and capitalist socio-economic hierarchies; this disdain permeated Lina's consciousness, driving her decisions at all levels of the design process (Ferraz 1994: 117; Bo Bardi 2013: 15). Corollary to this perspective was Lina's collectivist approach to aesthetic decision-making and curatorial expression. Over a period of twenty years Lina conversed with colleagues in the fields of architecture and design and consulted with Pietro as she crystallized the ideas that would manifest as the radical MASP strategy. While working with Gio Ponti in Milan in the 1930s, Lina had actively engaged in the emerging polemics of exhibition practice, a mode of expression that provided most young modern architects their only opportunity to present their own work to the public (Leet 1991: 21). For the Avenida Paulista space Lina's approach transcended the inspiration that she had taken from Albini's designs for Scipione & Black and White Exhibition at Milan's Pinacoteca di Brera in 1941, producing an unprecedented, unparalleled and unsurpassed intervention.

Theoretical and Critical Perspectives

The Italian Rationalists in Milan in the 1930s and 1940s and the Surrealists in New York in 1942 had challenged the institutional rigidity of museal practice before MASP opened its doors to the Brazilian public in 1968, but none succeeded so completely as Lina in liberating the museum from its function as a treasury-reliquary-mausoleum conceived to address, valorize and reassure cultural elites (Demos 2001). As Olivia de Oliveira notes, Lina 'dechristianized' the museum experience, making all works equally accessible to both the uninitiated and 'the ordained' by 'removing the "aura" from the pictures' (Bo Bardi 1970; Oliveira 2006: 276; Benjamin 1968). Lina contested the traditional valuation of paintings as luxury goods and precious objects, preferring instead to present them as the products of artistic labor, as 'trivial items' linked to quotidian life (Oliveira 2006: 276). In Lina's curatorial calculus, the installation became – in senses literal and figurative – a destabilized field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). Lina's approach eliminated hierarchies of chronology, movement, material and artist, metaphorically leveling and literally elevating the works in the MASP permanent collection. By affixing all labels to the backs of the easels, Lina's plan forced viewers to walk around the object in order to learn the name of the artist and other pertinent information. The tactic also meant that the frame, the nails or staples, and any transport and customs labels would be visible along with the artist's name, title of the work, date, medium, dimensions and accession information. Finally, the fact that a viewer could not see the work and the wall text at the same time meant that

the object and its metadata had to be viewed separately in time and in space.

With Lina's intervention, the impoverished rubber tapper would experience the paintings in the MASP permanent collection in the same way as the wealthiest of Paulistanos and visiting Europeans: as objects—objects liberated from hierarchies of space, time, connoisseurship and scholarship; objects produced by the labor of artists; and objects standing united in protest against the museological and museographical hierarchies and relegations that dominated exhibition practice in Europe and the United States. As Daniela Sandler notes, 'there was no prescribed path from artwork to artwork. Visitors should build their own path, and each visit or itinerary could create new and unexpected connections'. With boisterous crowds gathered in *manifestação* beneath MASP echoing the syncopated rows and columns of *cavaletes de vidro* that hovered above them, the view from outside the museum would provide a vision of solidarity: people and art in protest; structure, space and display as uprising. From within the structure, the 'rectangles of glass sticking out of their concrete bases, echoed the materials and volumetric relationships of the cityscape outside...joining the gallery space' with the chaotic, bustling high-rise city of São Paulo on one side and the Anhangabaú Valley on the other (Sandler 2011: 47).

Perhaps more than any other institution of its kind, Lina's MASP demands a sort of rhizomorphic sampling of twentieth-century theoretical and critical mechanisms through which to regard its meanings (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3–25). Writing about the work of architect Stephen Holl, architect and historian Shima Mohajeri articulates a series of points that one might reasonably apply to the experience of Lina's fenestrations of space and of time. Adapting the position of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (who wrote six years before MASP opened on Avenida Paulista), Mohajeri suggests Holl's *Experiments in Porosity*:

bring in the idea of spatial depth infused with time. The porous layers in space indicate the simultaneity of presence where [the] body moves through depth in time. That is when the body experiences the event of time and space in its continuity. The spatial porosity is a method for destabilizing the outlines and limits while displacing them back and forth in-between spaces. This continual closing and opening of space provides a room for the body to discover its own visibility among the invisibles created by the empty voids. Thus, the porosity in space will appear as a result of an uninterrupted flow of interpenetrated events within the spatial depth (Mohajeri 2009: 6; Holl 2005; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

In the MASP pinacoteca, one moved in and around and through and between the phenomenological field and the dematerialized temporal and spatial boundaries of the transparent floating box hovering above the void. For the viewer accustomed to conventional European

and American exhibition practice, MASP indeed destabilized the outlines and limits of the aesthetic experience. Those viewers whose first encounters with museums and with early-modern and modern European art and with Brazilian modernist painting occurred at MASP experienced an essentially unprecedented form of visual-cultural engagement with neither comparative nor contrastive referent—one wonders about their first impressions of conventionally exhibited works after having been visually acculturated to Lina's program.

Rather than experiencing the museum as a sedentary space striated by paintings hung wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling or by linear constructs of artistic movement and art-historical chronology, the uninitiated viewer exchanged nomadic gazes with the objects on display, never able to see the object and its mediating, filtering label at the same time (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 474–500). The resulting disconnection deterritorialized the works, separating them from their semiotic systems, effectively and affectively and neutralizing the semiospheric authority of such classifications as Renaissance, Baroque, Romanticism, French, Italian, etc. (Lotman 2005: 213, 217; Deleuze and Guattari 1977). Through this catalyzing mechanism of performative (dis)engagement, the novice who might have been otherwise alienated by the aura of each discrete expression of Euro-imperialist academic hegemony in the MASP collection welcomed and was welcomed by each work as a product of artistic labor. Conversely, the strategy intentionally alienated those among the ordained who had been conditioned by the institutional mandates of European museological and museographical convention to seek disciplinary reassurance through the ritual privileging of wall label text. Lina's installation allowed for both the uninitiated and the willing a smooth, nomadic space within which to 'restrain from all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to linger within the truth that is happening in the work', rectifying and revivifying the 'vital relationship' between viewer and object (Heidegger 1971: 66; Adorno 1982). Thus Lina's approach generated the free field within which viewers from various backgrounds representing the full range of exposure to the fine arts could become the willing guardians of her installation (Heidegger 2002: 23).

Changes to MASP after Lina's Death

'It is difficult and painful to visualize all the countless paintings on countless walls in countless rooms, halls and museums waiting to move back into space where they can again vibrate, breathe as it were' (van Eyck 1997).

In 1996, Lina's museological and museographical regimes were replaced for the first time with the exhibit *Italian Art in the Brazilian Collections 1250–1950* (*Arte Italiana em Coleções Brasileiras 1250–1950*)—under the curatorship of Luiz Marques. This change was meant to be temporary but nevertheless has remained for over 15 years. To facilitate the installation of this new exhibit, MASP director Julio



Figure 10: Current MASP interior (photograph by the author).

Neves and curator Luiz Marques made radical changes to the exhibition scheme. The labels of the works were removed from the backs of the easels and placed on view to encourage viewers to enjoy the works and learn the artists' names at the same time (Miyoshi 2011: 137–138). Shortly thereafter, painted plaster walls designed by Neves replaced the glass easels in the pinacoteca (**Figure 10** and **Figure 11**). The curators removed the glass panels, citing justifications that ranged from the impracticality of using glass easels for displaying tapestries and other such large works to reasserting the primacy of the painting-wall dialogue in response to what some characterized as Lina's 'intolerant' and 'authoritarian' exhibition scheme (Miyoshi 2011: 149; Cypriano 2003).

In December of 1996 a *Folha de São Paulo* article entitled *Cavalete de vidro gera polêmica no Masp* (Glass Easel Generates Controversy at MASP) by freelance journalist Erika Sallum summarized the viewpoints espoused by those in favor of preserving Lina's scheme and those who supported the introduction of walls, rooms, frames and conventional labeling. Advocates for the preservation of Lina's approach reiterated the unifying absence of hierarchies and divisions, the aesthetic and spatial freedom offered by the glass, the rejection of foreign models, the absence of the distorting influence of artists' names on the front of the works, and the ability of each viewer to determine her own itinerary or pathway for engaging with the paintings on display. Proponents of rooms with painted plaster walls, picture frames and conventional labels cited as a major concern moisture condensation on the glass panels and the resulting fungal growth that threatened to damage the works (Sallum 1996). The additional points were more polemical, declaring that 'a frame cannot have the same importance as the work of art', reminding that Lina had created the project in the 1960s and suggesting that the current generation has the right to develop the exhibition space it finds most interesting. Finally, those who supported the change to conventional museography argued 'to think that people will find a picture better or worse because of the author's name written

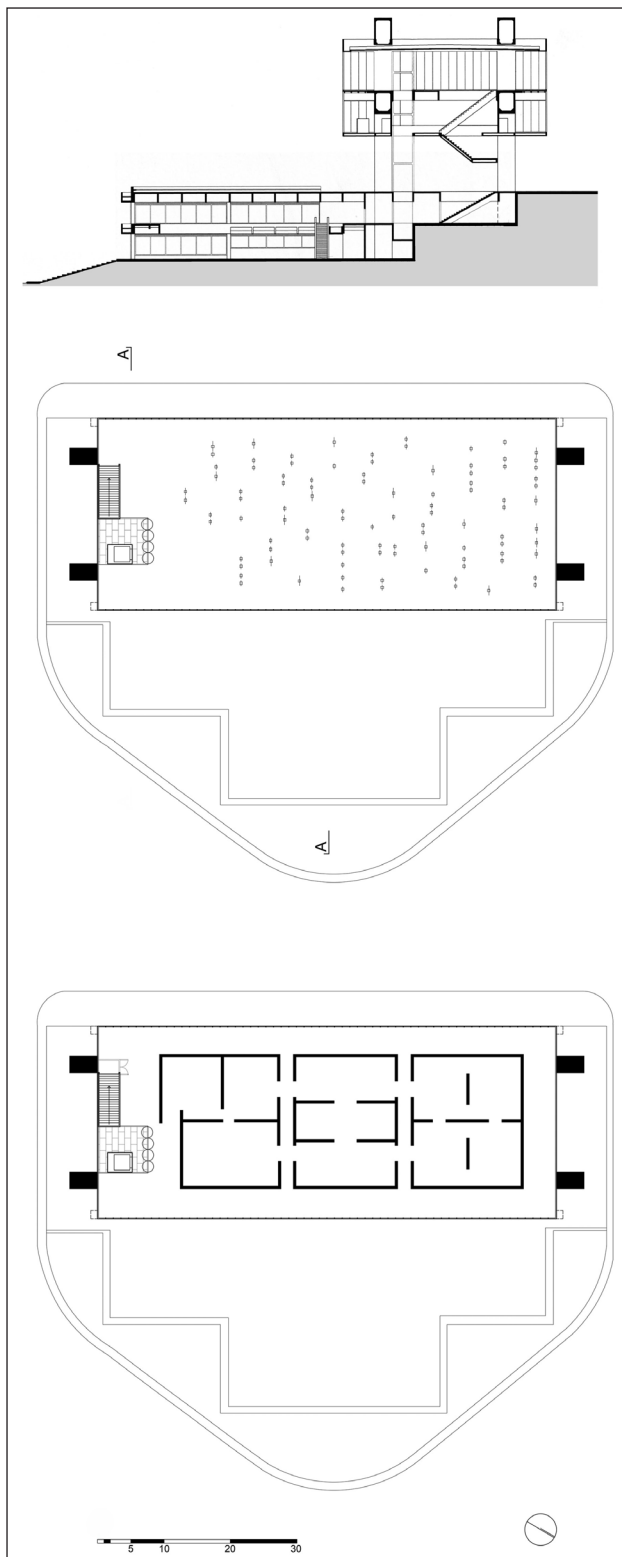


Figure 11: Architectural section drawings comparing original MASP scheme with 1998 revision (illustration by Gabriela Campagnol and Zhouzhou Su after Renato Anelli 2009a).

beside it underestimates their capacity' to think for themselves. The list concluded with a reassurance that the walls 'are provisional', to remain at least through the following year. Pending an evaluation of the success or failure of the change, the glass could return (Sallum 1996).

Writing in 1998, art historian and then-curator of MASP Luiz Marques detailed a number of additional concerns associated with the glass easels. The MASP collections include a substantial number of large-scale works such as tapestries, which Lina's panels cannot support, limiting public access to key works in the collection. The glass sometimes shattered under the weight of a work, resulting in damage to paintings on more than one occasion. Because of climate variability, the glass panels tended to expand and contract, causing deformations in the works that were attached to the panels by two rigid screws. This particular effect was most pronounced in the case of a fifteenth-century Florentine tondo that deformed into a parabola, meeting the surface of its glass panel only at the attachment points. The artificial lighting that was used to supplement the natural daylight was 'almost always insufficient' and the reflections and glare from the glass panels and the large windows degraded the visual experience of the works while also calling attention to their imperfections. Additionally, the exposure of the works to natural daylight for long periods of time accelerated the disintegration of some of the materials and surfaces (Miyoshi 2011: 146–147).

The Marques document also presented three conceptual problems inherent in the original MASP museology. First, Lina's scheme subordinated the artwork to the architectural space of the museum; Marques believed that the architectural space of the museum should be subordinate to the works on display: 'An architectural parti in museology should seek to optimize not the architecture (which would be narcissism), but the material and intellectual conditions in which the contact between the artwork and its audience takes place' (Miyoshi 2011: 148n19). Second, the easels served as both a critique of what Lina saw as the oppressive, controlling paternalistic didacticism of conventional museal practice and as protection from that restrictive museology, which privileged the political statement at the expense of the works on display. To validate his position, Marques recounted a comment by Michel Laclotte, director of the Louvre from 1987–1994 and a fastidious advocate of museographical convention, who purportedly referred to Lina's MASP as a 'musée-valise'—possibly referring to Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (a suitcase filled with reproductions of his works) or to the amateur portable museum movement that arose in Belgium in the early 1980s. While director of the Louvre, Laclotte famously transformed one of the large gallery spaces into a ballroom; a similar initiative was proposed at MASP shortly after Lina's death. Finally, Marques rejected Lina's claim that 'seeing a painting hanging on a glass panel is like seeing the work as the painter saw it when he created it' (Miyoshi 2011: 149). To follow the logic of this claim, one would need to be raised to the height of the scaffolding upon which Michelangelo worked in order to have an 'authentic' experience of the Sistine Chapel. For Marques, Michelangelo created the fresco with the full expectation that the viewer would stand beneath it on the floor; similarly, Raphael, Velázquez, Zurbarán and Goya produced paintings for display on the walls of their

patrons rather than on the easels of the artists (Miyoshi 2011: 149).

Relevant to the replacement of the glass easels with high and thick-painted walls, Marques offered a seven-point explanation:

- To improve the safety and security of the works in the collection
- To help achieve optimal thermal conditions and maintain humidity levels appropriate for the works as set by accepted international standards
- To allow guided tours for people to move unimpeded as a large group through the space
- To create diverse ambiances, environments, and/or situations that are respectful to the variety of formats and appropriate to the cultural characteristics and contexts of each work
- To facilitate the best possible lighting for each work
- To introduce historically oriented approaches by providing viewers the opportunity to travel freely through the space
- To restore the phenomenological and civilizational balance between the work of art and the wall – the architectural support with which the work has always dialogued and thus a constitutive element of its own historical identity. (Miyoshi 2011: 147)

Reflecting some ten years after introducing the changes, Marques justified the elimination of Lina's presence in the exhibition space, characterizing his own intervention as the fusion of museology and museography into a single solution specific to the conditions at MASP: 'There were no references or specific models, i.e., I did not rely on any other museum experience'. To 'debrutalize' the 'devastated' exhibition space, Marques worked with architect Vasco Caldeira. Of paramount concern was the hostility of the pinacoteca to the optimum presentation of non-contemporary art, and in particular the absence of a clear narrative format to facilitate viewers' understanding and appreciation of the early modern works. The 'dirty' light overwhelmed the canvases, exacerbating the negative effects of the 'disproportionate breadth of the interior spatial coordinates', which in turn 'suppressed a fundamental dimension of artistic appreciation'. Marques claimed only a partial victory, a reasonable but uneven success – especially in having made MASP a more 'habitable' space for the paintings on display. The results, according to Marques, were a radical improvement because both space and scheme started from such an extreme deficit in terms of museological and museographical quality (Miyoshi 2011: 151–153). For Marques, Lina's approach benefited neither the viewer nor the works in the collection.

In July 1999, shortly after the changes at MASP were made permanent under the directorship of Julio Neves, the Instituto Lina Bo and Pietro Maria Bardi applied to have the Brazilian Ministry of Culture protect MASP by designating the building as a site of national historical and artistic heritage through the Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN; the Institute for

National Historical and Artistic Heritage). Adding MASP to the national registry would help to ensure the preservation of the structure and the site. Marcelo Ferraz, among others, argued for the inclusion of the glass easels as part of the national heritage designation, claiming that the museological and museographical innovations at MASP were as important to Brazil's national cultural heritage as the building itself. Within a month, in a document signed by Julio Neves, MASP submitted a counter-proposal to have the museum listed without including the glass easels. IPHAN took more than four years to issue a decision. In December of 2003 the building and the site, without the easels, received national historic register designation. The accompanying IPHAN report included a suggestion that the original exhibition scheme be preserved, but stated that no penalty would be assessed if the MASP director and curatorial staff chose not to comply (Miyoshi 2011: 153).

Conclusion

MASP administrators indeed chose to ignore the IPHAN recommendations, a choice with serious implications for the conservation, preservation and protection of the heritage of Brazilian modernism. Selective preservation asserts revisionist hierarchy: some forms of expression warrant conserving, while other forms deserve no such consideration. The selective disposal of constitutive components of this heritage (such as Lina's glass easels) encourages additional distortions and depredations, as evidenced by recent proposals to construct a revenue-generating high-rise tower on the MASP site and to restrict access to the public gathering space beneath the span (Camargo 2005; Jatene 2006). The resulting degradation would permanently sever MASP from Lina's vision, bringing the site, structure and space into compliance with the homogenizing forces of globalization, which privilege Euro-American political, social, cultural, economic and aesthetic regimes rooted in predatory capitalism disguised as 'development'. As Lina conceived MASP as a single, cohesive object intended to democratize and thus de-hegemonize 'fine' art as a tool of imperialist power, the removal of the glass easels qualifies as no less than an act of cultural vandalism.

One could easily refute all of the justifications expressed by those responsible for the introduction of conventional framing and labeling systems and the installation of painted walls and European hanging conventions. Using commercially available reinforced glass to replace the 'fragile' panels, designing a non-intrusive display system for large-scale works, treating the panels and the exterior windows with an ultraviolet coating, introducing a computerized climate control system customized for São Paulo's tropical to subtropical conditions and replacing the deficient interior lighting with advanced lighting technology would render all concerns and complaints moot. The introduction of walls does not 'restore' the civilizational balance between painting and wall; rather, the intervention imposes such a relationship at MASP where none before existed. Subordinating individual viewers' personal encounters with images and objects to a narrative construct forced

onto the viewer in a guided tour undermines the agency of both the object and the viewer. Similarly, painted walls enforce a lack of diversity of experience, subjugating the MASP collection to a curatorial regime that has become a hallmark of European imperialist expansion and the formation of a modern nation-state.

As architect and scholar Marcelo Ferraz notes, 'A project as bold as this – as Bo Bardi herself said – could only have happened in the Americas, far away from the musty norms of the Beaux-Arts academies of the old world. In the Americas, everything could be done, invented, free of the "weight and the fetters of the past"' (Bo Bardi 2013: 129). Lina's MASP lasted for almost forty years – a testament to her vision and determination, and to the authority of Pietro, whose presence at MASP in the years immediately following her death ensured the preservation of her legacy. Once Pietro retired from the directorship of MASP, Lina's easels were removed. Today Lina's anti-museum, the 'museum beyond the limits', has been reduced to an inconceivable but all-too-intelligible simplicity in its full and partial enclosures; no longer complex, open and diverse, no longer the 'marvelous exception to the wrong rules' that today govern exhibition practices worldwide (Oliveira 2006: 262; van Eyck 1997). The relationship that Luiz Marques characterized as 'the basic unit of phenomenological perception of a painting' that is articulated as a 'tension between three elements closely associated: the canvas, its frame and its wall' has permanently reasserted itself at MASP (Miyoshi 2011: 150). Few tangible reminders of Lina's social space of 'uncompromising...simultaneous solidarity with people, art and architecture' remain (Lefebvre 1991: 68; van Eyck 1997: n.p.).

Vestiges of Lina's vision linger in the memories of the thousands of Paulistanos who wandered through the kaleidoscopic space, in works by such artists as Brazilian artist Vik Muniz – whose *Verso* series of paintings captured what one might have experienced looking at the back of a work through one of Lina's glass panels – and in recent exhibitions dedicated to the didactic triumph of Lina's *cavaletes de vidro* (Figure 12) (Muniz 2009). As late as 2010 one could experience the last remnants of the pinacoteca installation in the form of two replicas of Lina's concrete and glass supports, which were used to separate the food preparation area from the checkout line in the MASP restaurant (Mena 2010). Today those replicas display exhibition information panels and a portrait medallion of Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Melo (Figure 13).

Lina's characterization of the museum as the 'conquest of nothing' takes on a particular poignancy in the effacement of her curatorial presence. For critics of Lina's approach, such as Julio Neves, Luiz Marques and others the introduction of painted walls, frames and conventional labels has finally elevated MASP, for the first time in its history, to the status of a 'world-class' museum (Sandler 2011: 56 n65; Oliveira 2002: 11–19). Unfortunately, 'world class' today means that the monument voted in 2003 as 'the face of São Paulo' has been stripped of its manifesto, robbed of the glass easels and



Figure 12: Vik Muniz, *São Paulo, after Tarsila do Amaral* (2010). Wood, cloth, tape, labels, hardware and carpet. 112.24. 100.49. 6.35 cm. Galerie Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo.



Figure 13: MASP interior with two glass easels (photograph by the author).

the democratizing assemblage through which Lina liberated and elevated both object and viewer from false boundaries and distorting hierarchies to positions of unprecedented, unparalleled and unsurpassed agency and freedom. But as champions of Lina's strategy, such as Renato Anelli, have complained, 'the character of MASP is too strong to allow it to become the opposite of that for which it was designed' (Anelli 2009a). By reinstating Lina's full plan for MASP the desecration can be reversed and the museum can once again assume its rightful place as an architectural icon of São Paulo.

Authors' Note

Shortly before the time of publication of this article, the new MASP director, Adriano Pedrosa announced the possibility of a return to Lina's exhibition scheme, complete with the glass easels that were removed after her death. Time will tell as to whether MASP restores Lina's original plan for the museum (Marti 2014).

Acknowledgments

Portions of this essay appeared in the conference proceedings of the Creating_Making Forum held 3–5 November 2010 at the University of Oklahoma. The authors wish to acknowledge the following for their contributions and support in the completion of this article: Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, MASP, Renato Anelli, Aline Coelho Sanches, Ivani Di Grazia Costa, Romeu Loreto, Marcelo Ferraz, Zeuler Lima, Raul Juste Loes, Alex Miyoshi, Antonio La Pastina, Angela Person, Fernando Pinho, Silvana Rubino, Anastasia Sakellariadi, Zhouzhou Su and the reviewers, whose insightful questions and suggestions contributed to the preparation of this essay. Portions of the research for this article were funded by the Texas A&M University College of Architecture Faculty International Travel Fund. The authors wish to express their gratitude for this support.

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How to cite this article: Caffey, S M and Campagnol, G 2015 Dis/Solution: Lina Bo Bardi's Museu de Arte de São Paulo. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 13(1): 5, pp. 1–13, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/jcms.1021221>

Published: 16 March 2015

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