

Burle Marx legacy on the qualification of the urban space and landscape

Solange de Aragão¹, Denise Pessoa²

¹*UNINOVE- Universidade Nove de Julho*

solangedearagao@gmail.com

²*FEBASP- Centro Universitário Belas Artes de São Paulo, São Paulo (Brazil)*

denisepessoa@hotmail.com

Burle Marx was one of the most important landscape designers of the 20th century. His contribution to the qualification of several urban landscapes was extremely significant. He was an artist who knew exactly how to deal with lines (whether they were straight or curve, or even diagonal ones), contrast, harmony, proportion, rhythm, balance, color, tone, texture, mass, and any other artistic element or principle in order to create exuberant tropical compositions of vegetation under the light and a profusion of curious plastic designs on the floor. This personal skill evidenced his graduation in Art and his artistic eye in these tridimensional and spatial compositions.

This paper aims to present and critically analyze the relevance and value of his work in the context of the urban space taking into account some of his main landscape projects in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, such as the Flamengo Park (Rio de Janeiro, 1954), the Garden of the Safra Bank (São Paulo, 1982), the gardens of Pampulha (in the 1940's) and the Ibirapuera Park (São Paulo, 1953) – although the last one was never materialized in terms of those several gardens projected by the landscape designer.

In this work, we adopted the usual method of Humanities and Art research, which includes (a) bibliographical research, (b) reading of texts – in this case, mainly those written by Burle Marx and his critics, texts on the importance of open spaces to enhance people's quality of life and to promote or contribute to the quality of the city, as well as texts which emphasize the role of public and private open spaces in the planning of the urban space, (c) visits to some of his projects with photographic documentation, and (d) detailed analyses of his work.

Throughout this research we have found out that some of the works by Burle Marx have assumed a unique significance in the Brazilian landscape, particularly those which were implemented on large areas and are used by a large amount of people. Among them we could mention Flamengo and Ibirapuera Park. The first one, on the seashore and along the beach (on about four miles of waterfront) reveals the possibility of uniting Art to the landscape itself and the positive perception which results from this in all the people who make use of this space daily or face it for the first time. The second one corresponds to a really large green area in the middle of a city where green public spaces are scarce. Those curve pathways alongside masses of trees produce a pleasant sensation on the walker, notwithstanding those beautiful and colorful gardens remaining a lack in the project. While these works influence and alter a considerable part of such urban landscapes, other works remain as a master piece of the talented artist who was Burle Marx. The floor design and the wall garden of the Safra Bank are an exceptional example of the domain of the technique complemented by sensibility, as it happens also in the gardens of the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro and in many residential gardens. The project of Pampulha gardens demonstrates, on the other hand, that it is possible to establish a dialog between open spaces and built spaces – in this case, buildings designed by another exponent who was Oscar Niemeyer – and also between the garden and the landscape or the environs. The only error we find in this project, considering both landscape design and architecture, is an error of scale. Gardens and buildings should be larger and bigger than they effectively are so that their influence on the final landscape would be more exceptional.

With this article we intend to contribute to the increase and dissemination of the knowledge of Burle Marx work and legacy, to draw attention to the importance of open spaces in the planning process of the city, to remark their role on the qualification of the urban landscape, and to point out how fundamental is it to give attention to landscape design as a tool to create pleasant urban space for the people that uses it, with aesthetic value and with a considerable level of environmental awareness brought into light and into reality.

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