

BROMELIANA

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REMEMBERING ROBERTO BURLE MARX (1909-1994)

by Herb Plever

The stimulus for this article was a retrospective, month-long exhibition of the paintings and gardens of Roberto Burle Marx at the Jewish Museum in New York.

The Museum's brochure noted that Burle Marx "was one of the most influential landscape architects of the twentieth century, yet he is not a familiar figure outside of his native Brazil. He is best known for his iconic seaside pavements on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach, and for his abstract, geometric garden designs. But his work encompasses an enormous range of artistic forms and styles: Burle Marx was a painter and sculptor; a designer of textiles, jewelry, theater sets, and costumes; a ceramicist and stained-glass artist. He was an avid art collector, a talented baritone, a consummate cook, and a visionary self-taught botanist and ecologist. For him, all these endeavors were equally important, facets of one another."

The Museum omitted one



Burle Marx after being introduced by Herb Plever at the 1992 World Conference, Tampa Bay, FL

very important aspect of his work and interests: He was the first landscaper to use plants native to Brazil to populate his gardens. He acquired a coffee plantation in Sao Antonio de Bica on the outskirts of Sao Paulo and converted it to a large estate of many acres on which he created a beautiful, naturalistic landscape filled with plants he collected from the Brazilian rainforests, savannahs, rocks, cliffs and mountains.

Burle Marx grew and studied collected bromeliads, philadendrams, ferns, water lillies, orchids, and other tropical plants until he was expert in their biology and horticulture. That estate was donated by Roberto to the Brazilian government and it became a protected national monument called Sítio Burle Marx with more than 3,500 species of plants.

He amassed a very large collection of bromeliads, and became the dean of the great Brazilian bromeliad experts such as Roberto Menescal, Roberto Kautsky, Luiz Correia de Araujo,



A painting of proposed landscape gardens for the new capital Brasilia by Burle Marx

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, October 4th, 2016 promptly at 7:00 P.M. at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16M](#)
COLLECTING BROMELIADS IN ECUADOR Part 1 - A photo report by Greg Aizlewood of Queensland, Australia. Please bring plants for Show and Tell and for sale. If you want some 5-12-26 fertilizer call Herb at 718-723-3783.

Renato Bello, Elton M. C. Leme and Luiz Felipe Nevaes de Carvalho (who recently died).

Brom growers will recognize Roberto's name because *burle-marxii* is the name of a species in 10 genera: *Aechmea*, *Dyckia*, *Alcantarea*, *Cryptanthus*, *Neoregelia*, *Hohenbergia*, *Neoglaziovia*, *Pitcairnia*, *Orthophytum* and *Tillandsia*.

Early in 1990 a friend, who had just visited Burle Marx, reported that he was in poor health and seemed to be getting weaker. I was concerned because I had always wanted to get the BSI to honor Roberto at a World Conference. At the conclusion of the 1990 WBC in Houston it was announced that 1992 conference would be hosted by the Bromeliad Society of Tampa Bay. I collared Tom Wolfe, then President of that society, and asked him to consider inviting Burle Marx as keynote speaker of the conference. Tom said he would be happy to propose it to his Board if I could get Burle Marx to come.

I called Roberto in Brazil and invited him to come to Tampa Bay in 1992. He said he was honored but would have to decline because his doctor had ordered him to cut down on traveling. He admitted that he had to travel to New York in the fall of 1991 to install a large exhibition of his work at the Museum of Modern Art, but that was because he had made a firm commitment to the Museum the year before.

I asked him to hold his decision for a few weeks to see if he was feeling better. I called him back in two weeks and talked to him at length about the significance of his speaking at a World Bromeliad Conference and how much it would mean to bromeliad growers. Although he was unwilling to say yes, I could see he was wavering. So I called Elton Leme in Brazil and asked him to visit



A luxuriant landscape scene at Sitio Burle Marx



Copacabana Promenade, Rio



Bromeliads at Sitio Burle Marx



He also like water lillies

Burle Marx and try to persuade him to come. A short time later, Elton advised me that Roberto had agreed to accept our invitation, provided that we would pay for the expenses of travel and hotel for both and him and his health aide. Tom Wolfe and the Tampa Bay board agreed to do so. The Tampa Conference was a great success, and the BSTB and the BSI can be proud that we were able to honor a great man during his lifetime. Burle Marx died a two years later in 1994.

Coincidentally, the erudite Floridian Jose ("Pepe") Denayre and I both saw the Burle Marx exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York called "The Unnatural Art of the Garden. Among the art works, Roberto had supervised the installation of a very tall, abstract display of more than 100 bromeliads. Pepe was working at the United Nations at the time and says that when he saw that display he was turned on to bromeliads and became a grower and bromelophile.

In a career that spanned almost 60 years, Roberto Burle Marx created nearly 3000 landscape gardens and terrace and roof top gardens for public and commercial buildings, parks and private homes in 20 countries around the world.

Those of you who watched the Brazilian cultural exhibition at the Olympic Games in Rio, know that Burle Marx is honored as one of three great heroes of Brazil, not only for his artistic contributions but also for his life-long work to prevent the destruction of the rainforests.

In addition to creating thousands of paintings and sculpture, Roberto Burle Marx designed walkways and garden plots to beautify the avenues of many cities of Brazil and other countries. The most famous of these is the Copacabana Promenade - three miles of three different mosaic tile walks

on Atlantic Avenue along Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro.

Roberto is celebrated in Miami, Florida for his tile design on ten blocks of walkways on Biscayne Boulevard. To mark the 25th anniversary of Burle Marx's design of this Miami streetscape, the Consulate General of Brazil, and Passport Miami, sponsored a celebratory reception in Downtown Miami where a plaque was unveiled to permanently commemorate his achievement.

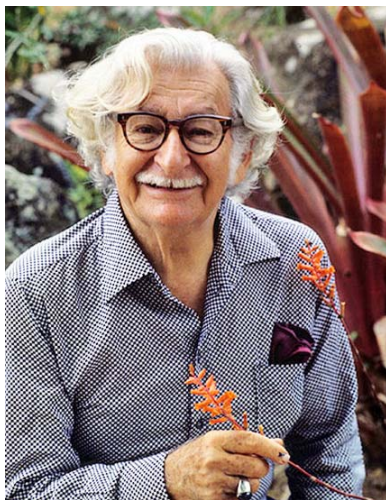


A section of Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL.

Lucio Costa, and Rino Levi, and his long-standing efforts to save the Brazilian rain forests."

Brasilia, in central Brazil, has been its capital since 1960. It is a very modern city that arose from a desert area where there had been no structures. Brazilian architects, especially the great Oscar Niemeyer created a city

of futuristic public and commercial buildings and private homes all surrounded by landscape gardens and terrace and roof gardens designed by Roberto Burle Marx.



An inflorescence brings a smile

He also excelled in the visual arts, transferring some of his major design works to colorful paintings and tapestries as he developed his signature gardens of bold curved forms mixing plants and local materials.

To accompany Burle Marx's exhibition at the New



Costume design for the ballet Petrushka(Fokine/Shostekovich)

York Museum of Modern Art in 1991, William Howard Adams published a booklet with 90 photos in which he recognized "Burle Marx's affinity for the sensibilities of such 20th-century artists as Calder, Léger, Miro, and Picasso, and his unique ability to apply their vocabularies in eloquent compositions of earth and plant." Adams described the evolution of Burle Marx's art, his close collaborative relationships with such architects as Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer, designed landscape gardens and terrace and roof gardens in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Petropolis and other Brazilian cities.

Among these are the Itamaraty Palace with the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and buildings for the Ministry of the Army, Ministry of Education & Health, Ministry of Justice, the National Congress of Brazil (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) and the Claudio Santoro National Theater. Of course there are many hundreds of Burle Marx

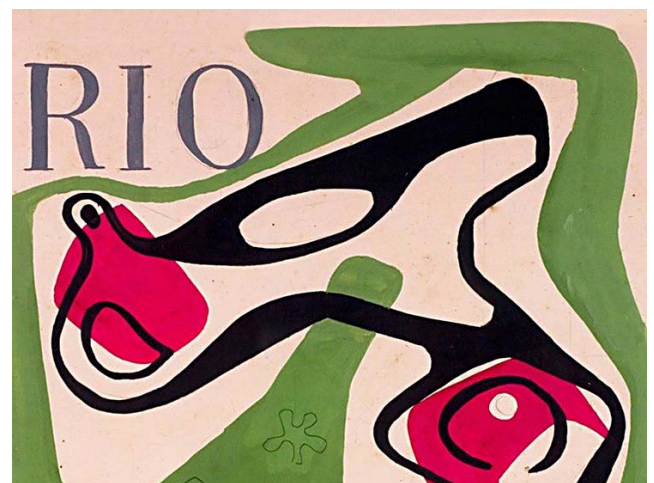
designed landscape gardens and terrace and roof gardens in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Petropolis and other Brazilian cities.

In the conservatory of the famed Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA, Burle Marx created

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Blooming Guzmanias, Cascading Gardens Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, PA



Magazine cover designed by Burle Marx

a permanent bromeliad display with sprays of water cascading into clear pools. The bromeliads are mounted on the vertical rock walls of the greenhouse. Roberto used hundreds of plants, 35 tons of rock and 3,000 feet of heating cable to create today's Cascade Garden.

Burle Marx designed some breathtaking gardens for the private estates of wealthy clients. For me the most spectacular garden was one Roberto designed for Odette Montiero. It was later redesigned by Burle Marx for a new owner of the property.

For about 100 years following 1830, the "Coffee Barons" in Imperial Brazil, made huge fortunes growing and selling coffee ("Black Gold") in the Paraiba Valley of eastern Sao Paulo. One of the owned the Vargem Grande Coffee Farm in Arieas; by and one of his descendents undertook to convert that huge coffee plantation into an estate. He hired Burle Marx and his associates to landscape it was different gardens. It was so huge a project it took Roberto 10 years to complete it, and of course he used lots of bromeliads.

The Cavenelas Residence in an estate near



Odette Montiero Valley Garden in Petropolis,



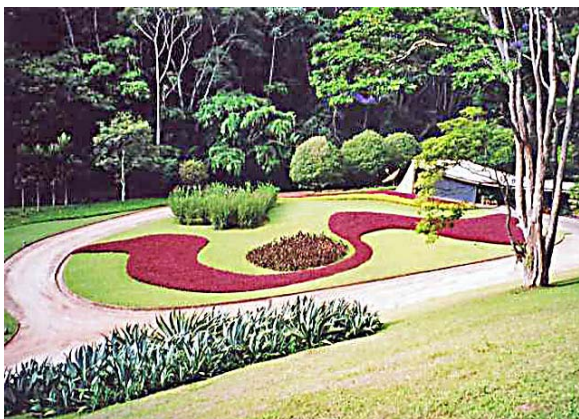
Vargem Grande, Arieas

Petropolis had been demolished in the 19th century. When it was purchased by Gilberto Strunk, he hired the architect Oscar Niemeyer to rebuild the Residence and Roberto Burle Marx to landscape the estate grounds with gardens. The team of Niemeyer and Burle Marx were the choice for many famous government, commercial and private buildings.

Roberto Burle Marx died on June 4, 1994 at the age of 84 years in a farmhouse in Bara de Guarativa. It is important that from time to time we acquaint new members and remind ourselves of the illustrious contributions this great artist and humanist made to our world.



Broms in Sitio Burle Marx



Strunk Garden, Petropolis

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