



IN PRAISE OF DIVERSITY BENCHES FROM BRAZIL

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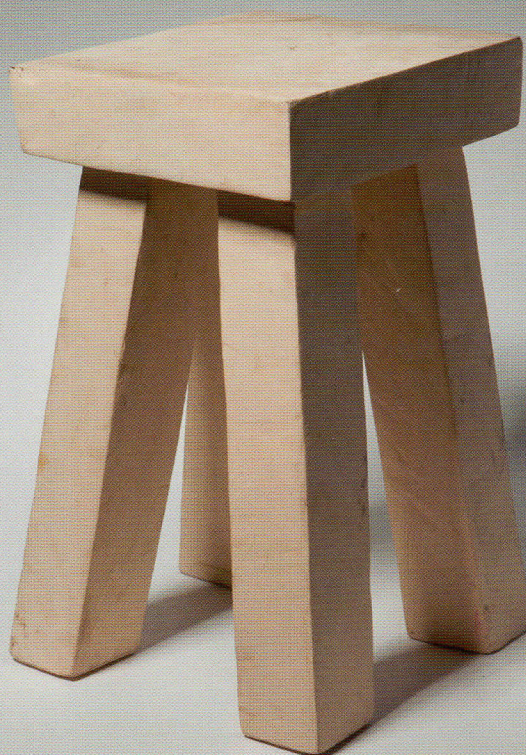
In Praise of Diversity: Benches from Brazil

The exhibition 'In Praise of Diversity: Benches from Brazil' curated by Adélia Borges, brings together, with no hierarchical differentiation, around 55 benches conceived by designers, artisan communities and indigenous peoples of various regions of Brazil. Diversity is the exhibition's key word. The decision to present them together, side by side, serves the purpose of exploring the idea of how the same function – to sit – can bring about totally different objects. Therefore, it may be seen that indeed form follows function, but goes even further, expressing the culture of the location where the objects are designed and produced.

The Indian benches have shapes and graphics rich in meanings that cross over generations. Carved from a single piece of wood, some mimic animals such as a jaguar, monkey, hawk or vulture, while others have clean forms as if they came straight from the Bauhaus handbooks. The benches made by illiterate craftsmen who work with materials at hand in the community where they live, often encompass valuable lessons on ergonomic comfort and proper use of raw materials.







September 16th - October 21th, 2012

Hôtel Droog
Staalstraat 7B, Amsterdam
www.hoteldroog.com

Curator: Adélia Borges

Artists: Juruna, Karaja, Mehinako, Trumai, Suyá, Wai wai, Waurá, Tukano, Baré, Wajampi, José Paraguay, Severino Borges, André Fontes Torres, Genival Santos, Yang da Paz Farias, Carlos Motta, Flávia Pagotti Silva, Ilse Lang Silva, Michel Arnoult, Sergio Rodrigues, Ivan Rezende, Patrícia Naves, Tina Lo Pumo, Lui Lo Pumo, Marcelo Rosenbaum, Rodrigo Almeida, Fetiche, Bete Paes, Carlos Fernando Ekhardt, Nelson Schiesari, Patrícia Fernandes, Sergio Mattos, Rona Silva, Rodrigo Gonçalves, Oliva Design, Pedro Useche, Claudia Moreira Salles, Sabrina Arini, Marcos Paulo Caldeira. Partners: Mondriaan Fund and Premsula The Netherlands Institute for Design and Fashion
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The Netherlands
Institute for Design
and Fashion

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mondriaan
fund

A World That's Not So Flat

Interview with Adélia Borges, curator
'In Praise of Diversity: Benches from Brazil'
by Agata Jaworska



What instigated your interest in diversity?

Uniformity is boring. Diversity is stimulating, because it is fertile. I feel this is the case in all fields – in language, architecture, music, cinema, etc... and also in design.

Why were you particularly interested in stools?

Historically, stools have been present in the Brazilian material culture since long before 1500, when the Portuguese colonizers arrived in Brazil. Traditional stools from the indigenous societies were re-created by common people all over the country, and nowadays, many furniture designers have stools in their portfolio. In a country that is a melting pot of cultures, where indigenous, African and European heritages mingle and recreate themselves, the stools express this melting with grace. And, unlike chairs, with their more or less high backs, stools do not explicit or strengthen hierarchy among users;

they imply a relationship of equality in society. Stools do not have a front or back, enabling people to sit on them in so many ways, with freedom to turn sideways and to change their views. In general they can be easily moved around, and they are versatile, serving other functions such as footrest, side table, nightstand and even as a step that can be taken around the house to help reach high places.

When looking at these stools, what can be seen behind their aesthetics? How do the aesthetics relate to ethics, and other kinds of sensibilities?

When we see all these 60 seats together, side by side, we can realize how the same function – to sit – can bring about totally different objects. We can realize that indeed form follows function, but it also follows the culture of the place where each object is designed and crafted. In this sense, their aesthetics are strongly related to ethics, since they express and embody the specific symbolism of the society of origin.

Crafts are carriers of tradition. How do you see this relating to the present and the future? Can digital technology play a role in bridging the two?

For a period, many believed that industrialization would kill craft. Similarly, many believed that globalization would kill local cultural expressions. The advancement of modern industry would be inexorable and, little by little, make pre-industrial production disappear. To 'defend' craft, in this scenario, would be a mere reaction of people going against the flow of history, hostile to humanity's development. In short, a nostalgic backward view that would inevitably be buried by world progress. However, this prognosis of extinction was not confirmed. There are many clues to the contrary; that the place of craft in our modern society is expanding. This growth is not merely based on the ability these objects have of fulfilling their functions, but also on their symbolic dimension. In this renewed signification, what matters is the ability an object has to bring to their users values that have only been recently acknowledged, such as human warmth, uniqueness and belonging.

And of course digital technology can also play a role. What we see in the present - and I believe we will see also in the future - is a mixture of technologies. Craft, industrial and digital techniques intertwine and mingle, many times in the same object!

Do you think crafts can offer a new kind of link between indigenous cultures and globalization? Could you imagine a scenario that enables this?

Yes, I do think crafts can play this role. In the 1970s, the Nobel prize winning Mexican writer, Octavio Paz, could already imagine the scenario we are living today. He has beautiful texts about this, about how crafts possess the beauty of imperfection, how they age with dignity, being able to stand by our side for our whole lives, and how they tell us about a precise place where they were made by concrete people, bringing an uniqueness that is highly valued in a globalized world. Crafts convey culture and memory, they bring in them a feeling of belonging. Because of all these things, they can touch - and the use of the verb touch is not fortuitous - our hearts, our souls.

What do you think is the value of a more diverse panorama instead of a uniform one?

We can trace a parallel with the culinary arts and industries. In the last half of the 20th century, dissemination of fast foods would offer the same

burgers and the same fries anywhere in the world. Standardization was supposedly a proof of trust, a symptom of progress. But if we had continued on that path, we would have a poorer culinary landscape today. Fortunately, in the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st, we witness the recognition of regional cuisine. There is an understanding that the experience of diversity can be seen as personal enrichment and sensorial expansion.

Why do you think is the issue of diversity particularly urgent now?

Cultural diversity can make the world less monotone and "flat". The implicit idea behind colonization was that some people have a better religion, a better language, a better culture than others. Today, fortunately, there is a recognition of the importance of maintaining our differences. The most important document about this issue is the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, issued by UNESCO

Adélia Borges

Adélia Borges is an independent design writer and curator living in São Paulo, Brazil. From 2003 to 2007 she has been the director of the Museu da Casa Brasileira, a government-funded museum specialized in design and architecture. She did the curatorship of a number of exhibitions in Brazil and abroad. Among the last were the Brazilian Design Biennial (2010) and "Puras Misturas" (Pure Blends, 2010), an exhibition introducing a new museum devoted to improve the dialog among cultures in Brazil, which she has conceived for the government of São Paulo.

As an author, wrote "Designer não é Personal Trainer" (2002), "Sergio Rodrigues" (2005), "Brazilian design today: Frontiers" (2009), "Design + Craft: The Brazilian Path" (2011), among other books. As a journalist, she directed the magazine "Design & Interiores" (1987-1994), was the design editor of "Gazeta Mercantil", a daily business newspaper (1998-2002), and was a freelance writer for Brazilian and international magazines (Indaba in South Africa, Interni in Italy, Form in Germany, etc.). Her books, articles, book chapters and other texts have been published in Portuguese, Korean, German, Spanish, French, English, Italian and Japanese. Adélia teaches Design History at FAAP, in São Paulo. Her main interest is in design that enhances quality of life.

www.adeliaborges.com