



## THE MARAJOARA INFLUENCE IN BRAZILIAN ART DÉCO

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*The cumaru trees in flower lend a festive note to the scenery...*

Gaston Cruls. *The Mysterious Amazonia*, a Brazilian novel. Rio: Livraria e Editora Valverde, 1944.

Marajó in the Brazilian Amazon, the world's largest fluvio-marine island, had already undergone several phases of development before the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers. The Marajoara phase, considered the most significant, stretching from 400 to 1350, left behind an array of innumerable exquisitely decorated artifacts, such as funeral urns, benches, sculptures, vases, tangas and ornaments in stone, terracotta, ceramic and clay.

Twentieth-century inventions, such as cars, airplanes and seaplanes, plus the adventurous spirit of many scientists, historians, journalists, businessmen, and even looters, made Marajó a very popular place to visit. Artifacts of the pre-Cabral era were much sought after worldwide by museums, collectors and art dealers. Brazilian art tuned into this moment, and a group of creative individuals took advantage of this line of business. In fields as diverse as literature and music, architecture and the applied arts, the Nativists were born.

In interior design there was a crave for objects, furniture, lamps and rugs, in fact anything on which mazes, zigzags, Greek frets and geometric designs based on Marajoara drawings could be printed. The Brazilian jungle had been tamed!

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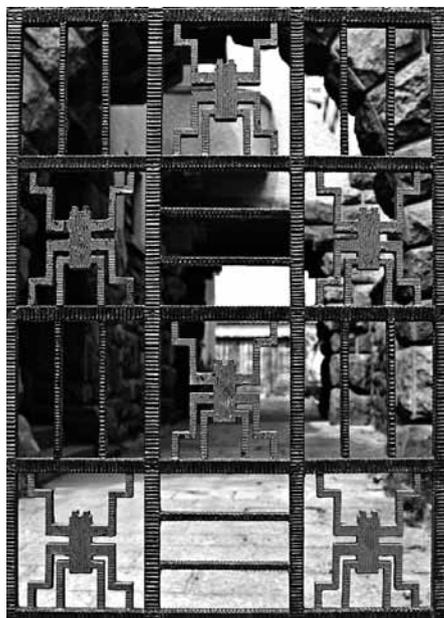
The phenomenon was truly national, and even en masse, one could say. It is no mere coincidence that the country's first television broadcast on the São Paulo TV Tupi, on September 18, 1950 was called *Show da Taba*, and that throughout its lifetime the symbol of this channel would be an indigenous boy, the *curumim*. Advertising endlessly focused on indigenous themes, also adopted in the nomenclature of shops, businesses, buildings, etc.

The 1930-1945 Getúlio Vargas government played on national pride and returned to the country's origins in its search for parameters for a national project. The project was undertaken but not without a certain antagonism between architects and designers.

The competition to design the Ministério da Educação e Saúde (1936) building was won by Memória & Cuchet for their design of Marajoara inspiration but was never used, due to pressure from the *modernist* architects Lúcio Costa, Niemeyer and others, who, using Le Corbusier as their basis, built what is now called the Palácio da Cultura in Castelo, downtown Rio.

On the other hand, in Lisbon at the great 1940 exhibition, *O Mundo Português*, the Brazilian pavilion, projected by the famous Portuguese Raul Lino, was decorated by Roberto Lacombe in wonderful Marajoara style. This is but one example of how Brazilian identity between 1930 and 1950, when Art Déco was at its prime, was represented by aboriginal, *marajoara*, *guarani*, *tupi* and *tupinambá* inspiration. There are countless examples of this, some still preserved in Rio de Janeiro, such as Casa Marajoara at 319, Rua Paissandu, Flamengo, dating from 1937, signed by Gladstone Navarro or the Edifício Marajoara in Rua Prudente de Moraes in Ipanema.

The geometrization of abstract and figurative themes was truly characteristic of Art Déco, the style of the early decades of the twentieth century, with its broad geographic spectrum, and a rereading of different exotic cultures. Life in the wild, the



noble savage, and fauna and flora became major themes in the decorative arts. Brazil, straddling both jungle and civilization, developed its own style in the decorative arts – Marajoara Art Déco. In the words of Lúcio Costa, “it pits our most authentic native energy, our roots, against the harvest of new ideas from the nineteenth century”.

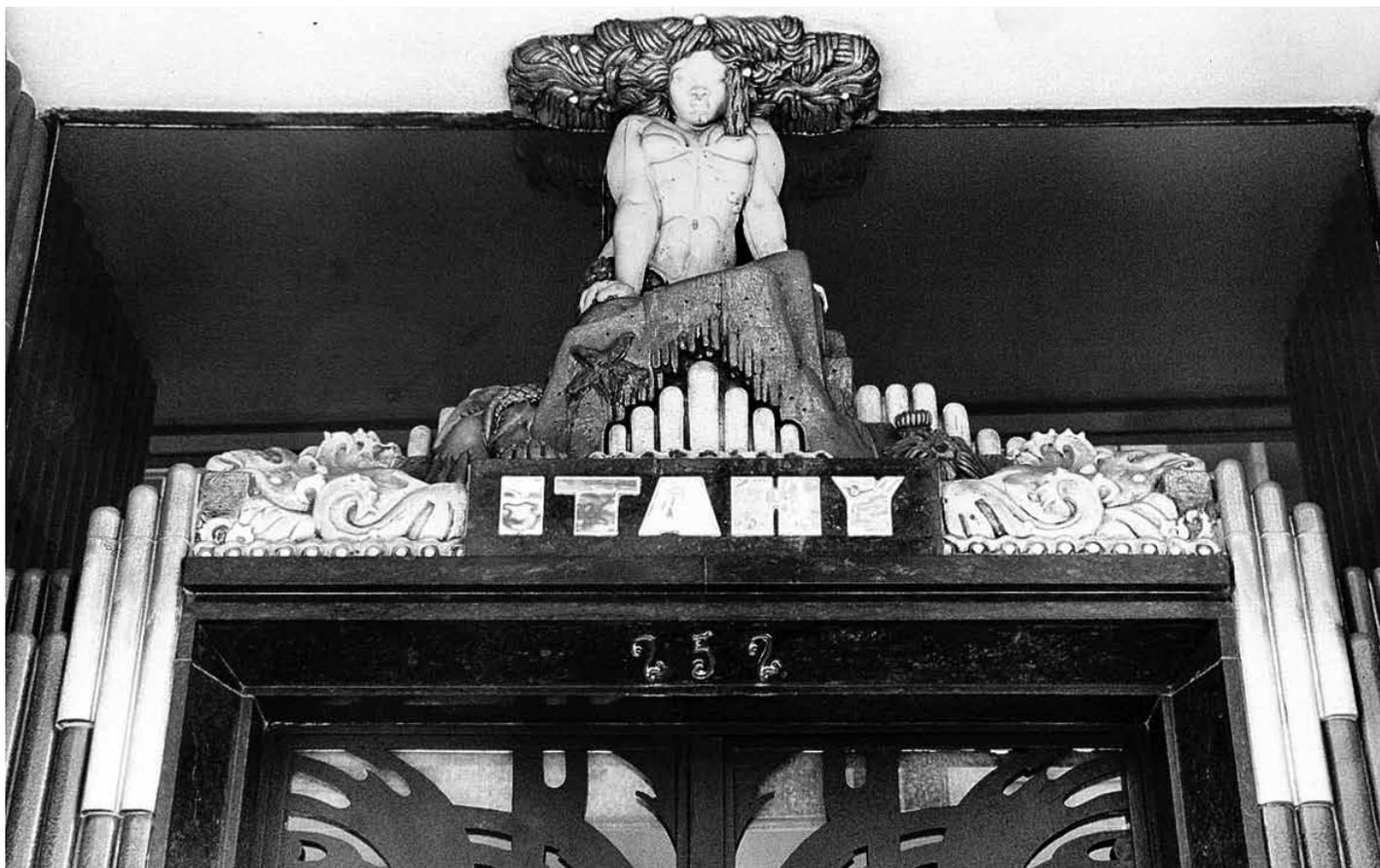
In the history of Brazilian art there was now a cultural fact, unifying the whole country with no boundaries between erudite and popular. Mário de Andrade noted that the ballerina Eros Volúcia was the first to take mystical Native American dances to the level of classical choreography.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Eliseu Visconti (1866-1944), on returning from his classes in France with Eugène Grasset, devoted much of his time as a decorative arts painter to presenting different models of vases, book covers, cushions, stamps, etc. A ceramic piece in the shape of a jug with marajoara-inspired decoration, produced in the Ludolf studio, is the highlight of the collection.

The creations of Theodoro Braga (1872-1953) from Pará, almost entirely devoted to the nationalist style of Brazilian Art Déco, are exquisite. They include paintings, carpets, and above all metal pots, real technical feats, in no way inferior to the hammered and polychromed works of the French master, Jean Dunand. With the architect Kneese de Mello, he went to his utmost to organize a “Retiro Marajoara” in Sao Paulo in the 1930s – a panel of possible uses of themes ranging from architecture to interior decoration. It included everything: floors, railings, furniture, wallpaper, lighting, objects, etc.

Several other artists were renowned for their use of this nativist theme.

Pedro Correia de Araujo (1881-1955) is the author of the imposing portico of the Edifício Itahy (Av. Nossa Senhora de Copacabana, 252, Rio de Janeiro), built in 1932, an unquestionable sign of the presence of indigenous inspiration in Brazilian



Art Déco. Above the main door of the building, an indigenous-caryatid-mermaid in polychrome ceramic welcomes visitors. She is surrounded by crustaceans, such as crabs, sea horses, and algae, from the sea and Amazonian rivers. The ground area emphasizes the aerodynamic architecture of the whole, designed by Arnaldo Gladosch, but unfortunately, the open verandas have been closed, thereby doing away with the impact of the fullness/emptiness sensation, so important in the *streamline* style. Correia de Araújo is also the author of the entrance and hallway of the Edifício Manguaba (Rua

Gustavo Sampaio 220, Leme). He explored the same theme, with his beautiful etching work on a mirror behind the entrance desk.

Hildegardo Leão-Veloso (1899-1966) was the sculptor of many monuments in Rio de Janeiro, including those dedicated to Admiral Tamandaré, in Praia de Botafogo (1937) and to Pinheiro Machado in Praça Nossa Senhora da Paz, Ipanema (1931). He was one of the few Rio de Janeiro architects who attended the 1922 Week of Modern Art in São Paulo. At the beginning of the 1940s, he designed two life-size works, which had been

commissioned for the terrace of the Ministry for Finance. One showed an indigenous man fighting a cougar, Brazil's largest feline, and the other an indigenous woman with an anaconda. On the same terrace, with its stunning views of Guanabara Bay, there are mosaics by Paulo Werneck (1907-1987) also addressing the same indigenous theme. The terrace also houses the work of Leão-Velloso, who designed the portico of the beautiful Edifício Amazonas (Rua Fernando Mendes 25, Copacabana), an Art Déco building in Rio de Janeiro's Lido district, where the largest number of buildings in this style are to be found.

Leão-Velloso left a substantial output in *craquelée* ceramics, inspired by the origins of Brazilian culture. There are vessels with indigenous designs showing respectable tribal chiefs or sometimes sensually illustrated indigenous women. The majority of these vessels were produced by the Frenchman, Henry Gonot, from Itaipava, a town near Petropolis (50 minutes from Rio, right in the Atlantic Forest). Gonot had been a student of Lachenal, the master of French Art Nouveau. His production, based on research into *marajoara*, *guarani* and *tupi* themes, at the Rio de Janeiro National Museum, was so successful that he invited Édouard Cazaux (1889-1974), one of the major French pottery makers of the Art Déco period, to visit. His invitation was turned down but was recorded as *the South American Adventure* in the biography written by his daughter, Mireille.

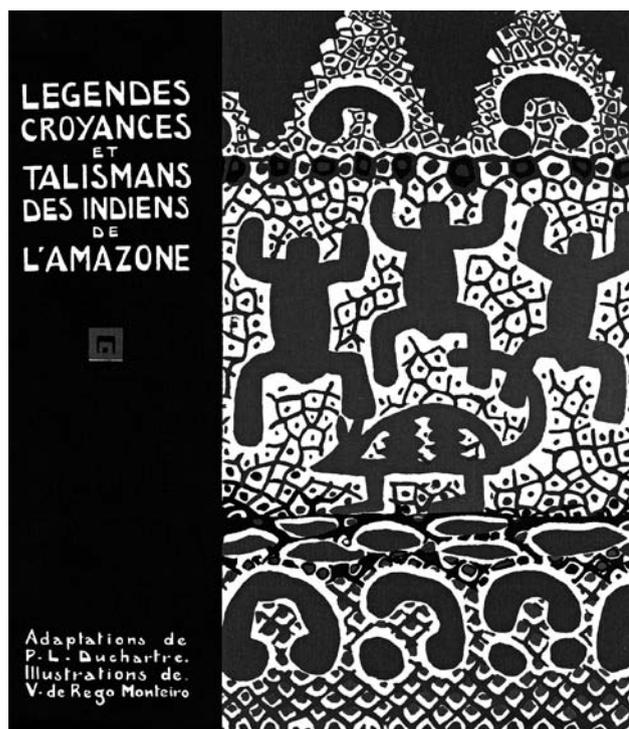
As well as Gonot, many other foreign artists, interested in this nationalist aspect of Art Déco, visited. In 1922, one of the top Parisian designers, Michel Dufet (1888-1985), arrived at the Red Star, which Alastair Duncan in his book *Art Deco Furniture* describes as the best decoration shop in South America. He came with the intention of creating avant-garde projects seeing that Rio de Janeiro had recently been included among the capitals of global modernity and that a recently-acquired pride to be Brazilian was in vogue. But Florence Camard, in her biography, states that he complained that his first commission was to adapt the French pavilion of the 1922 International Exhibition, that of the Centennial of Independence

and a copy of the Petit Trianon at Versailles. The pavilion had then recently been donated by the French government for the headquarters of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. By the time he left Rio de Janeiro in 1925 to continue his brilliant career in Paris, he had used tropical themes with great skill. In Paris he set up the atelier Au Bûcheron and continued to use exotic Brazilian woods as he was a friend of the best wood suppliers.

It cannot be forgotten that, from April to October 1925, in Paris, the Brazil of jungle origins fared brilliantly during the event which symbolizes Art Déco, the International Exhibition of Industrial and Modern Decorative Arts (from where, as we all know, the term “Art Déco” was taken).

At the height of the Parisian ballet season, from July 10 to 25, 1925, *Légendes, Croyances Talisman et des Indiens de l'Amazone*, an adaptation of the book of the same name by the Pernambuco artist, Vicente do Rego Monteiro (1899-1970), was held at the modernist temple of Avenue Montaigne – the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (a 1913 Auguste Perret project which laid the foundations for the new architecture), decorated with panels by Antoine Bourdelle and illuminated by Rene Lalique. The famous Russian dancer of the time, Malkowsky, subject of a sculpture by the Martel twins exhibited at the Une Ambassade Française pavillon, participated. It was an unqualified success and, in the same year, motivated Vicente to edit a 300 picture album, *Quelques Visages de Paris*, where the main tourist attractions of the city use a marajoara style. During the presentation, Vicente do Rego Monteiro joked that he had been given the drawings in the middle of the Amazon jungle, by an Indian chief who had visited Paris incognito a short time beforehand.

It could be said that out of that batch of foreigners who came to Brazil, wanting to thoroughly explore our lifeblood, the Portuguese Fernando Correia Dias (1893-1935) stands



out as a symbol. In January 1914, he moved to Rio de Janeiro and in August 1919, in the *Revista Nacional*, he published “*Nacionalismo em Arte*” – a real manifesto, exhorting Brazilians to look to their roots and abandon the artificiality of European parameters in their practice of the decorative arts. It would be interesting to compare such a manifesto with the *Manifesto Antropofágico* of the modernist Oswald de Andrade.

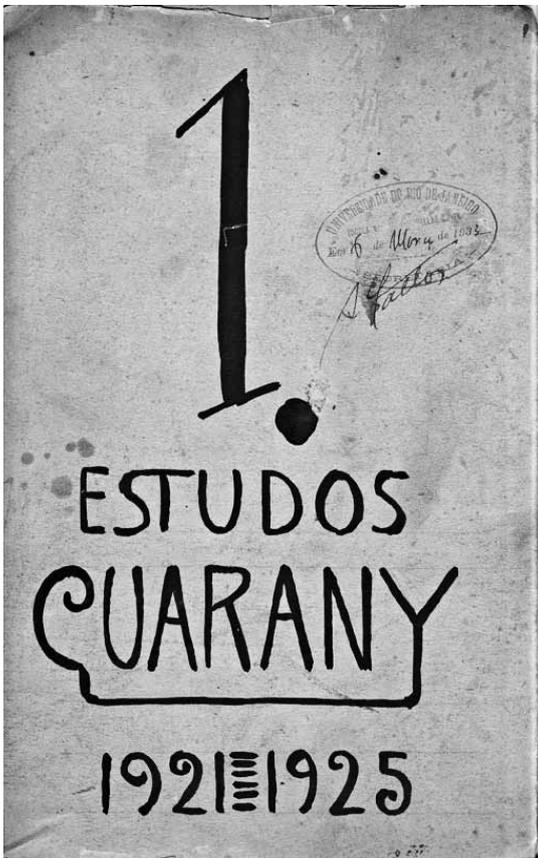
It is strange that such a document, a symbol of concern for our past in the practice of everyday art, calling on Brazilian artists to take up a nationalist stance, should have come from a European. Inevitably it reminds one of Tarsila do Amaral, who only discovered Brazil in Paris in the 1920s, after her classes with Léger and Lothe. Correia Dias, associated with the Companhia Cerâmica Brasileira, immediately produced an extensive range of products such as vases, tiles, dishes, all intended for Brazilian homes. He designed covers for books and music scores and dedicated himself to Brazilian design in its origins, always taking indigenous themes as his inspiration.

He designed a swimming-pool for Guilherme Guinle’s home, in Rio de Janeiro, in which he used ceramic tiles with indigenous designs, surmounted by a huge *muiraquitã* figure (a marajoara amulet in the shape of a *batrachia*), from which water gushed.

He married the poetess-writer Cecília Meireles, his model for several book covers. With her encouragement, he used nationalist themes in Art Déco style. In Lélia G. Soares’s introduction to Cecília Meireles’s *Batuque, samba and macumba – estudos de gesto e de ritmo 1926-1934*, a collection of watercolors, gouaches and Indian ink, we find the phrase: “Undoubtedly, life with her first husband, the talented designer and illustrator Fernando Correia Dias de Araújo, contributed towards reinforcing this tendency. Herman Lima in his *História da Caricatura* presents Fernando as a decorative humorist who collaborated with the Rio de Janeiro press and book illustration in the 20s and 30s.”

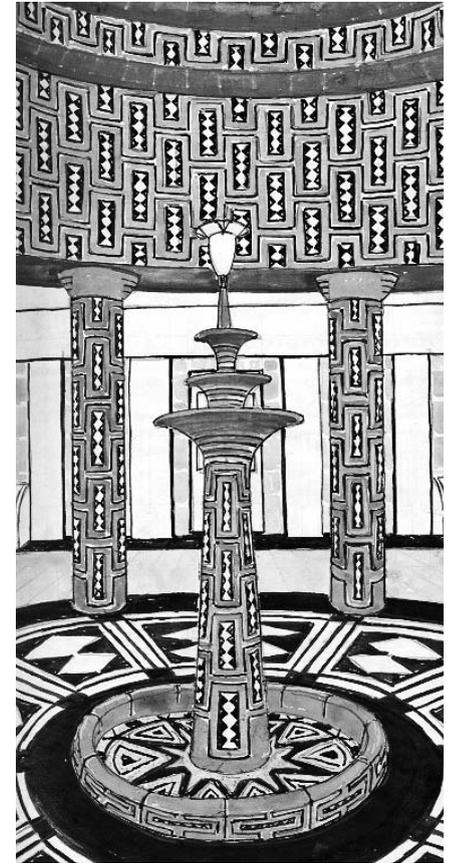
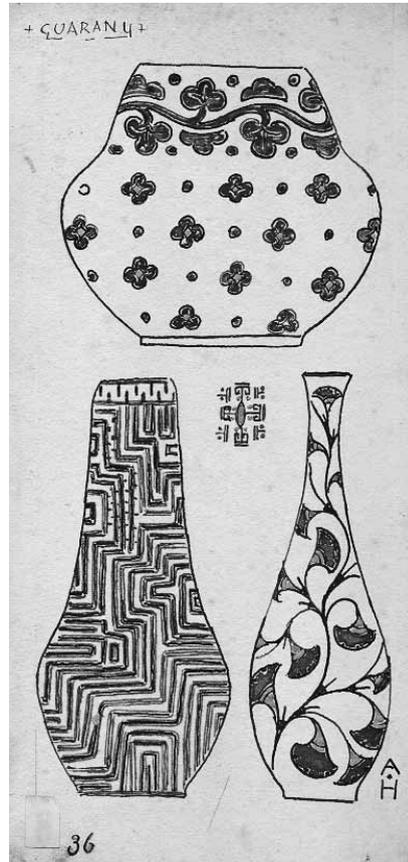
From Strasbourg, France, August Herborth (1878-1968) arrived in Rio de Janeiro in the early 20s and over a period of ten years produced about 500 works in watercolors, gouache and ink, exploring the marajoara theme in all areas of architecture, interior decoration and design. His works were very successful when presented to the public for the first time at the 9<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Art Déco in Melbourne, Australia, in May 2007, during a lecture I gave, entitled, ‘The Aboriginal Origin of Brazilian Art Déco’.

Herborth gave the name ‘Guarany’ to his 19 albums and when presenting them in the 1920s, he gave lectures, cultivated the press and sided with Correia Lima



in his attempt to encourage Brazilians to look to their origins for genuinely national architectural and decorative art themes. He was invited by the Curitiba City Hall to design sidewalks in Portuguese stone using motifs from his albums and many of these sidewalks are still preserved today. Nowadays these hundreds of designs are part of the Art Déco collection of the Portuguese patron of the arts, Commander Joe Berardo. These precious documents have just been quoted and published in the German journal *Keramos* (editions 203/204 of 2009) in a long article by Professor Arthur Mehlstäubler.

Ivan da Silva Bruhns, (1881-1980), born of Brazilian parents, who maintained his Brazilian nationality, now considered to have been



the greatest Art Déco carpet weaver, used Brazilian indigenous motifs in many of his works. He even gave the name 'Brazil' to one of his carpets. He had a gallery at 9, rue de l'Odeon, from 1925 to 1930, and at 70, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, from 1930 to 1945. He also became the owner of a factory, the Savigny, and further explored new readings of African, Aztec and Mayan Art.

The Frenchman Paul Rivet, director of the Museu de l'Homme in Paris and an outstanding figure in the study of anthropology in the early twentieth century, declared:

*In Latin American indigenous art, the art of the ancient inhabitants of the island of Marajó and of the lower Amazon remains one of the most mysterious. In terms of beauty, it can be compared with the most perfect artistic production of the great Andean civilizations. The revival of this art, making it known in the Brazil of today, reconnecting the past with the present in a beautiful aesthetic tradition, is at the same time to create an artistic, scientific and patriotic piece of work.*