



## *To The Birds or an imaginary journey to Brasilia*

2022

A temporary intervention in the aviary and in the former glasshouse (Orangerie) in the public park *Lindengutpark* in Winterthur.

The park belongs to the classicist villa Lindengut, which was built by the industrialist *Johann Sebastian Clais* at the end of the 18th century. Later it was inhabited by business families from the textile or engineering industry.

The setting of a villa complex at that time included a park, a glass house (conservatory) and an aviary. (This aviary here was officially established only in 1955, before that it was a poultry house).

Today the aviary is maintained and cared for by the association *Pro Volière Lindengutpark* (formerly: *Ornithological Society Winterthur*, founded in 1872). The conservatory is currently used by *Stadtgrün Winterthur* as a workshop and depot.

Importing exotic birds and plants from distant continents to Europe has its origins in the colonial intentions and expansions of Europeans to other continents. In the 9 cages of the aviary, in addition to pheasants, cardinals, species of pigeons and ducks, various species of parakeets and Amazon parrots can be seen. The parrots' range extends from southern Mexico and the Caribbean islands to Uruguay and northern Argentina. The parrots, one of the more conspicuous bird species, are also found in Brazil.

In my exploration of the colonial past of spaces and materials, I took an imaginary trip to Brasilia.

Like many areas in South America, the territory of Brazil was colonized by Europeans (On April 22, 1500, the Portuguese navigator *Pedro Álvares Cabral* (1467/68 or 69 - 1520) landed in the

Bay of Cabralia, in the state of Bahia).

Before colonization, indigenous ethnic groups belonging to the Tupi and Guarani language families lived there.

It was a Portuguese colony until its independence in 1822.

Already at the end of the 18th century, there was a plan to establish a new capital, away from the coast, transferred to the inland. In 1822, this proposition was officially recorded. This was to emphasize a distance to - and to highlight the new independence from Europe and its former colonizers.

In 1956, *Lucio Costa* (Brazilian architect and urban planner, 1902 - 1998) was commissioned by *Juscelino Kubitschek* (then president of Brazil, 1902 - 1976) to design a master plan (Plano piloto = land use plan) for the new city of „Brasilia“.

Simplified, the shape of the plan is a cross on a map. Or seen differently, the plan had the shape of an airplane.

*Oscar Niemeyer* (Brazilian architect, 1907 - 2012) designed the individual buildings of the center, such as the ministries or the Palace of Justice and the prototypes for the residential buildings. The city should be able to accommodate up to 500,000 people.

On April 21, 1960, the construction of the center was completed and the city was officially „inaugurated“.

The choice of the date is not accidental, it is the commemoration day of *Tiradentes* (1746 - 1792), a fighter for the independence of Brazil and in addition it is also the foundation day of Rome. This contributes to the myth of a city as a built utopia.

In 1987, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

„Brasilia“ is a dream city, designed at a desk. The main material used for this purpose was concrete (reinforced concrete structures). It was the ideal medium for its transformation into reality.

Concrete (lime mortar) is a millennia-old building material that was used in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and then again, especially in the post-war years, to construct buildings quickly, cheaply and functionally.

The post-war years were also the years in which the last of the former colonized countries, such as Algeria, India, and many countries in Africa became independent.

In 1947, India became independent from the former colonial power, England. As a result, Pakistan was separated from India. The province of Punjab is located in this area, and the now majority Hindu Indian part of Punjab now lacked a city, as the previous provincial capital of Lahore is now located in the Muslim part of Punjab (Pakistan).

*Jawaharlal Nehru* (1889 - 1964), the first president after independence, commissioned *Le Corbusier* (Swiss-French architect, 1887 - 1965) to plan a new city from scratch: „Chandigarh“. In 1952 it was started.

*Le Corbusier* was a great role model for *Oscar Niemeyer* and many other architects.

In 1943, he wrote the „Manifesto of Avant-garde Urbanism of the Future“, the „Athens Charter“; these are urban planning principles that had been discussed and agreed upon at the International Congress of Architecture (CIAM) in Athens in 1933: The modern city should be separated in its functions into living, working, relaxing, moving.

„Chandigarh“ I visited in 2013. It was built according to these principles. The city was the template for „Brasilia“ in Brazil.

In modernist architecture in Europe, there was a principle: „Form follows function“. The building should be consistent in its form, construction and purpose (function) and everything superfluous should be omitted. Orthogonality (right angle) was a must.

*Le Corbusier* did not stick to it and *Oscar Niemeyer* broke the rules even more. His architecture is monumental, the building becomes a sculpture, there are not only 90° angles, there are curves too.

Elements that can be traced back to colonial architecture and that both architects incorporated into their vocabulary are pilotis (supports), brise-soleils (vertical or horizontal slats that protect against the sun's rays), sloping ramp entrances, projecting roofs, and azulejos



(blue/white tiles, a tradition adopted from Portugal of covering walls or even entire buildings with tiles). The word *azulejos* is of Arabic origin and means tiling.

In 1954 *Max Bill* (Swiss architect and artist, 1908 - 1994) visited Brazil and during his stay he gave a lecture to architecture students.

In his lecture he mentioned four elements that bothered him about Brazilian architecture. One of them very much: It was the free, organic form that, in his opinion, *Wassily Kandinsky* (Russian artist, 1866 - 1944) had been the first to implement in his paintings. (However, the latest research proves that it was the painter *Hilma af Klint* (Swedish artist, 1862 - 1944) who was the first to paint abstract, small-format pictures in 1906).

For *Max Bill*, free form could not be reconciled with the principle that architecture should be purely functional and only in this way could beauty be achieved. He described the free forms such as curves or curved supports (*pilotis*) as: „An orgy of anti-social waste, lacking any responsibility towards the client and the user.“

(Quote: page 99, *Oscar Niemeyer, Self-Representation, Criticisms, Oeuvre*. Edited by Alexander Fils, published by Frölich & Kaufmann, 1982).

*Roberto Burle Marx* (Brazilian landscape architect, 1909 - 1994) was commissioned to design countless gardens and parks. With his mention I conclude my excursion into the history of architecture:

During a stay in Berlin in 1922, he for the first time discovered the native plant species of Brazil in the Dahlem botanical garden! After his return to Brazil, he was the first to plant the gardens and parks with native species.

Until then, the plant vocabulary of the designed gardens consisted exclusively of imported European plants.

The meaning of the word „Brazil“ leads back to Winterthur, which achieved its prosperity through the textile and machine industry.

The meaning leads back to the Portuguese name *pau-brasil* of the Brazilwood tree. The wood was an important export product from the forests of the Amazon region at the time of early colonialism.

„Brasa“ means „embers“ in Portuguese. The adjective „brasil“ means „glowing“ and refers to the color of the wood when it was freshly sawn. It was used in Europe to dye fabrics.

This impossible attempt to summarize and recount over 500 years of colonial history in dry facts on a few A4 pages seems important to me in order to embed the installed art works in the aviary and the conservatory in the context that I am concerned with here in this project. In doing so, I had to omit a lot.

The almost unimaginable idea that an entire city can be designed at a small desk, and that the design has also been implemented, has always accompanied me during the preparations for this exhibition.

In the aviary, as in the conservatory, there is a climate of its own. They are artificial worlds that (are supposed to) awaken longings for a better world; they are realized utopias too.

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Media:

In the aviary: concrete, formwork boards and other recycled wood, screw clamp, ceramics, rocking chair (bamboo).

In the garden house (conservatory): formwork boards, diverse wood panels (found objects), screw clamps, bamboo pole, roof batten, panel painting (acrylic on plexi on wood panel), cacti.

Literature i.a.:

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