



Isaac Julien

Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement

7 JUNE–27 JULY 2019

‘Linear time is a western invention;
time is not linear, it is a marvellous
entanglement, where at any
moment points can be chosen
and solutions invented without
beginning or end.’

– Lina Bo Bardi *

VICTORIA MIRO · 16 WHARF ROAD · LONDON N1 7RW

Screen idol

Isaac Julien bends time and space to celebrate Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi on film

by Nick Compton

In a darkened room flashes of looming concrete walls and extruded limbs – serial images of Lina Bo Bardi’s SESC Pompéia art and leisure centre in São Paulo – pulse to a score by the German-Spanish composer Maria de Alvear. The artist and filmmaker Isaac Julien and his editor Adam Finch – the room is part of Julien’s David Adjaye-designed studio overlooking a stretch of Regent’s Canal in north London – are working on the complex choreography of footage that will eventually play across nine carefully placed 6ft-tall screens and make up the seven distinct sections of his new work, *Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement*. It’s a kind of dancing-about architecture and a dizzying work.

Five years, on and off, in the making, the piece is Julien’s multi-part tribute to the Rome-born polymath modernist who became Brazil’s most significant architect outside of Niemeyer. Though a long way from a straight-ahead biopic – Bo Bardi would have hated anything so linear and reductive, he says – Julien wanted to make clear Bo Bardi’s creative stretch: her smarts as writer and essayist (she worked with Gio Ponti at Domus in the mid-1940s), furniture designer, exhibition designer, costume designer, theatre designer, jewellery designer, as well as her celebrations of Brazilian pop and folk culture, her role as cultural lightning rod, and her commitment to architecture as activated social space for all. Bo Bardi’s reputational stock may have risen remarkably over the last decade, but Julien insists she is still underappreciated.

His passion for Bo Bardi’s life and work began in 2012 when he was invited to show at SESC Pompéia. Completed in the mid-1980s and designed around the husk of a retired oil drum factory, Julien calls it a tropical version of London’s Hayward Gallery but with more community outreach. ‘They run all kinds of activities – sport, dance, theatre, music, art exhibitions. It’s really utopian and the architecture is amazing.’

Julien worked with the local architect André Vainer on the installation of his SESC show, ‘Geopoetics’. Vainer had worked with Bo Bardi on the design of the building and its creative fixtures and fittings. ‘And it dawned on me that he was using all these techniques

that Bo Bardi had developed for the display of the work; from the use of the materials to how the name of the show and other information was presented. That’s when I became really interested in all things Bo Bardi.’ (Julien was so enamoured of Bo Bardi’s art display devices, simple wooden ladder systems and stark concrete plinths with glass easels designed for SESC Pompéia and her Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), that he had his own made. He used them for his recent *Lessons of the Hour – Frederick Douglass* installation at the Metro Pictures gallery in New York.)

More fundamentally, the show and the installation made him think about the mechanics of his own art. Julien has made his reputation with multi-screen video installations, often shown with related still photography. His work – from 1989’s *Looking for Langston*, through *Vagabondia* (nominated for the Turner Prize in 2001), *Baltimore*, *Fantôme Afrique* to *Ten Thousand Waves* and *Playtime* combines crystalline, lyrical imagery, dance and documentary, looped and fractured narratives and the occasional appearance of high-wattage stars, including James Franco and Maggie Cheung. Taking in his multiple screens requires fluid, mobile viewing, a constant flutter and flow.

‘That was one of the things I realised at SESC Pompéia; there was a choreographic conversation happening in the way Lina Bo Bardi worked scenographically,’ Julien says. ‘I had a light bulb moment in relation to my thinking about space and architecture and the distribution of images in space.’

In 2013 Julien created the poster for ‘The Ghost of Lina Bo Bardi’, an exhibition curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist at The Glass House, the architect’s former home in São Paulo. And his 2015 piece *Stones Against Diamonds (Ice Cave)* was inspired by a Bo Bardi letter to her husband and featured a CGI version of her staircase at the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAM Bahia), constructed using techniques usually used in the making of ox carts. Bo Bardi managed to incorporate vernacular techniques and materials into her work more successfully than perhaps any other great modernist, a commitment which makes her work feel utterly contemporary and key to the resurgence of interest. ‘Like many emigrés, she looked at the country from a fresh perspective,’ says Julien. ‘She embraced the craftsmanship of its north east and reflected a more organic Brazilian culture back to itself.’

Over the last couple of years, Julien has shot across seven Bo Bardi-designed locations: SESC Pompéia, MASP and, also in São Paulo, Teatro Oficina, her final project; as well as four buildings in Salvador, the capital of the northeastern state of Bahia, where Bo Bardi lived and taught for five years. Julien has a particular passion for Bo Bardi’s work in the city, where half the population are descendents of men and women



forcibly hauled from west Africa to work in Brazil’s plantations and gold and diamond mines. He shot the Casa do Benin, which Bo Bardi designed with the French-born photographer Pierre Verger, and Coaty, a social housing and restaurant project built on the ruins of the area between the port and the historic centre of the city. The project was never opened and it too quickly fell into ruin. The site is now guarded by the military police, a force to be reckoned with in Brazil, and Julien spent two years wrangling before gaining access.

Julien picks up and riffs on Bo Bardi’s own architectural riffs, her staircases and wall openings, her careful engineering of public places and her buildings’ relationship to nature. But the buildings are also sites for intervention, or ritual even. Very much in the spirit of Bo Bardi, and as the name suggests, *A Marvellous Entanglement* is a mass of creative collaborations.

Julien again makes use of the staircase at MAM Bahia, inviting the local choreographer Zebrinha and the Balé Folclórico da Bahia dance company to create a staircase-specific piece. At Casa do Benin, Julien

installed fabrics by the artist Goya Lopez, an homage to Marielle Franco, the (black, female) politician and human rights activist shot dead in Rio last year by a local militia with possible links to the current president Jair Bolsonaro. At Coaty there is performance by young Salvadoran actor Diego Pinheiro. Bo Bardi also appears in the piece, played by Fernanda Montenegro, the 89-year-old grande dame of Brazilian film and theatre, and her daughter Fernanda Torres. The two are often on screen at the same time, reading extracts from Bo Bardi’s writing, a smart looping of time which unspools any sense of traditional biopic linear momentum.

For Julien, this is not a history of Bo Bardi in Brazil or any kind of summing up. He is after the ‘sensation’ of her work. ‘We can leave the historic Bo Bardi to the historians. Of course there is a great documentary to be made about her, that’s just not what we are doing. The thing we want to communicate is the architecture, the movement, the dynamism of it. And to use her ideas. And ask what Lina Bo Bardi and Brazil mean today. These are the questions we want to explore.’

Lina Bo Bardi was born Achillina Bo in Rome in 1914. After studying architecture in the city she moved to Milan, setting up her own studio in 1942, aged just 28. Her nascent career interrupted by war (her studio was destroyed by aerial bombing in 1943), she moved from Italy to São Paulo in 1946, quickly re-establishing her practice and co-founding with her husband, the writer, curator and collector Pietro Maria Bardi, the influential art magazine *Habitat*, and later becoming the editor of *Domus*. Bo Bardi's work is characterised by the integration of the values of the Modernism with those of Brazilian popular culture and its pluralist identity. She applied construction techniques learned from local craftsmen to her designs, which include iconic buildings such as São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), Museu de Arte da Bahia (MAM-BA) and SESC Pompéia, widely considered to be her masterpiece. In addition, she was a noted editor, illustrator and curator, a designer of jewellery and creator of set designs and costumes for experimental film and theatre. She died in 1992. Posthumous exhibitions dedicated Bo Bardi's work include the major touring exhibition *Lina Bo Bardi: Together*, organised by the British Council in 2012. In 2014, a Google Doodle commemorated what would have been Lina Bo Bardi's hundredth birthday.

COVER *O que é um museu? / What is a Museum? (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement)*, 2019. Endura Ultra photograph facemounted. 180 x 240 x 7.5 cm, 70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

* FERRAZ, Marcelo C. (Org), Lina Bo Bardi. São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo Bardi e Pietro M. Bardi, 1993. p.333




Born in 1960, **Isaac Julien** lives and works in London. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at institutional venues including AROS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark (2018), The Whitworth, Manchester (2018), The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (2017), MAC Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2016), MUAC (Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo), Mexico City (2016); the De Pont Museum, Netherlands (2015); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013), Art Institute of Chicago (2013), Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2012), Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo (2012), Bass Museum, Miami, Florida, USA (2010), Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2009), Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea - Museu do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal (2008), Kestnagesellschaft Hanover (2006), Pompidou Centre Paris (2005), and MoCA Miami (2005). He has exhibited at biennials including the 56th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art – La Biennale de Venezia (2015), Johannesburg Biennale (2012), Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011), Shanghai Biennale (2010). Julien was the recipient of The Royal Academy of Arts Charles Wollaston Award 2017. He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to the Arts in the Queen's Birthday 2017 Honours List. In 2019, Isaac Julien was appointed to the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Julien and independent curator and writer Mark Nash, the former head of contemporary art at the Royal College of Art in London, will work together on developing the Isaac Julien Lab at the UC Santa Cruz campus, which will provide students with the opportunity to assist Julien and Nash with project research and the production of moving-image and photographic works in California and London.



Nick Compton's article appears in the June issue of *Wallpaper** magazine, with a limited-edition subscriber cover by Isaac Julien. See the issue for exclusive photography of the artist in his studio.
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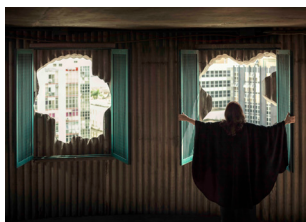
UPPER GALLERY



Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement, 2019
Nine-screen video installation, super-high definition (4K), colour,
9.1 surround sound, ash wood plinths
Duration 39 min 08 sec

Victoria Miro

LOWER GALLERY



Tecnologia pré-histórica / Prehistoric Technology (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

Situated in the Ladeira da Misericórdia [Mercy Slope], Salvador, the Coaty Restaurant was part of a pioneering initiative to rehabilitate Pelourinho neighbourhood, integrating new architecture into the existing vegetation. Ladeira da Misericórdia is one of the few remaining historic connections between the two main sections of the city centre.



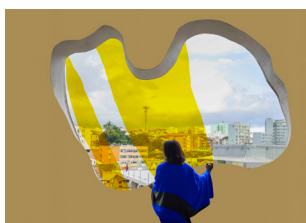
Almas belas, almas menos belas / Beautiful Souls, Less Beautiful Souls (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

Artists from the performance collective Plataforma Æràká collaborated in this series. The Salvador-based group's practice combines references as diverse as post-modern performance, the theatre of Grotowski, contemporary art and literature, reflecting on African-Brazilian culture and its decolonial ethos.



Um maravihoso emaranhado / A Marvellous Entanglement (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

The hanging system in wood, metal and concrete holding this photograph was developed by Lina Bo Bardi to allow different ways of juxtaposing works. The displaying structure was first presented at the exhibition 'Bahia no Ibirapuera' in 1959.



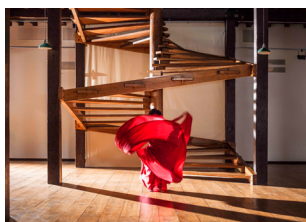
Sem começo nem fim / Without Beginning or End (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

This photograph taken at Museum of Art of São Paulo features Lina Bo Bardi's iconic glass easels, adopted by the museum in 1969, with which the architect meant to question the inaccessible aura of artworks and challenge Cartesian forms of exhibiting.



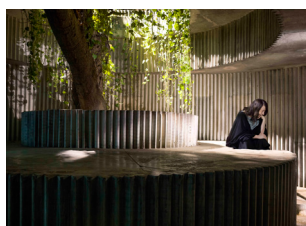
O que é um museu? / What is a Museum? (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

While renovating the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Lina Bo Bardi created another iconic piece: the spiral staircase built utilising traditional methods, entirely in wood, with no screws or nails.



Soluções inventadas / Solutions Invented (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

Photographed at Coaty, Ladeira da Misericórdia, Salvador.



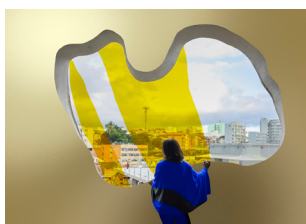
Duas linhas sobre Pierre Verger / Two Lines on Pierre Verger (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Endura Ultra photograph facemounted

180 x 240 x 7.5 cm

70 7/8 x 94 1/2 x 3 in

A leading name of 20th century photography, Pierre Verger (1902-1996) was also a key interlocutor and friend to a number of the foremost Brazilian artists of his time, including Lina Bo Bardi. As reflected in his photographs featured in this piece, he developed a particularly strong connection with African-Brazilian religiosity, coming to hold a prominent position in Umbanda.



Oxum além do espelho / Oxum Beyond the Mirror (Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement), 2019

Coloured and gold foils mounted on dibond

Framed dimensions:

62 x 86.7 cm

24 3/8 x 34 1/8 in