

The Concrete Project

Brazilian design around the 1st National
Concrete Art Exhibition: 1948-1966

André Stolarski

Inside and out of the arts

Artists with noteworthy performances in plastic arts were never a novelty, but a good part of the 20th century's artists made some appearance in and around graphic arts. A smaller contingent appeared also in the more restrict group of design and architecture. In general, these incursions complemented and enriched their artwork, but seldomly went beyond being supporting works for much more potent ones.

Constructive art is an exception to this rule. Committed from the start to establish the autonomy of the artistic speech and to the transformation of the productive and material basis of society, it expanded quickly outwards from its core. In Brazil, it is not an exaggeration to say that the transformations produced by the constructive trends in the plastic arts, literature and design were equally important. The word "influence," for example, is a shy word to illustrate the impact of constructive art on Brazilian design.

In order to find out why this occurred, it would be interesting to revisit the origins of the movement and remember that the first definitions of constructivism did not apply only to the works themselves, but to any object constructed (built) from the articulation of autonomous plastic elements free of any representative burden. Therefore, constructivism couldn't be figurative, for obvious reasons, nor abstract, for less sophisticated reasons – or maybe not so much, since, if the abstract forms are only representations transformed from nature and still preserve their referential in some way, then they cannot be autonomous. In summary, constructivism was an art composed by autonomous elements, non-representative, that tended towards pure or essential colors, geometrical shapes and rational ties that sprung from simple and precise relationships.

It didn't take long for this art form to engage in several encounters with science, wherever it presented itself to investigate the behavior of autonomous and essential structures to man: Saussure's linguistics, Peirce's semiotics, Gestalt's theory, Fröbel's pedagogy, Einstein's physics, and the urban theories of the industrial city as well as the engineering of steel, glass and structural concrete.

In the other hand, the attitude of constructive artists was fundamentally politicized. By laying claim to the autonomy of the elements pres-

