

ART DÉCO IN CAMPINA GRANDE: APPRECIATION, RECOGNITION AS HERITAGE AND OBLIVION¹ Marcus Vinicius Dantas de Queiroz²

*Singing my forró brings to mind
Memories of my childhood and makes me cry.*

*O beautiful flower, beautiful dark
Campina Grande, my Borborema.*

*I remember Maria Pororoca,
Josefa Tribertino and Carminha Vilar.*

*Bodocongó, Alto Branco and Zé Pinheiro
I learned to play the tambourine in forrós there³.*

Jackson do Pandeiro's memories of childhood and youth, a recurring theme in his musical world, evoke sounds of the coconut instrumentalists at the Campina Grande Market, the smells of the wares on display, the songs of the casinos, the accents of a city with cosmopolitan airs, the swims in the Bodocongó dam, the gulps of white rum taken in the pubs among the brothels, the disturbances, the racket and stabbings in *forrós* and cabarets, sleepless nights in prostitutes' beds. The frenetic pace of the then beginner tambourine player would seem to harmonize with a rapidly expanding and changing landscape throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Campina Grande, at the time, was undergoing a profound process of reform of people and heritage, in tune with all the efforts being made to bring Brazil into the network of international capitalism, and to make

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3. Lyrics of the song *Forró em Campina*, by Jackson do Pandeiro, on his 1971 record, *O Dono do Forró*.



it *civilized*, urban, industrial and modern. The motto of sanitizing, improving and beautifying guided renovations on the physical structure of the municipality, in order to get rid of the colonial impression which the city presented up to the early decades of the twentieth century.

The meter, rhythmic hybridism, speed, urban themes, modern symbols, an eye on the world and the defense of the roots of national culture which were frequently the basis of the Jacksonian repertoire also found expression in the Campina Grande and Brazilian architecture of the period. Art Déco, neo-colonialism, missions, rationalism and all the miscellaneous and unimaginable mixtures possible seem to harmonize with that pioneering moment of experiment and blend of *coco*, *xote*, *frevó*, *baião*, *marcha*, *rojão* and samba (all varieties of dance music), triangle, accordion, bass drum, tambourine, wind and string instruments and the subsequent *yeh-yeh-yeh* guitars⁴. The dilemma between tradition and modernity, between universal values and local heritage, was resolved in the *Chiclete com Banana*⁵ song, because after all, “I just put bip-bope in my samba when Uncle Sam plays a tambourine, when he takes up a tambourine and a bass drum, when he realizes that samba is not rumba”. Then you can mix Miami with Copacabana, banana and chewing gum and samba-rock is produced.

However, Art Déco was the most widespread cultural manifestation in that local context of the 1930s and 1940s. As elsewhere in the country, its staggered streamlined forms, high and bas-relief of geometric figures on the façade were what was common to the style and associated with virtually all the architectural projects of the era, from churches to cabarets. Cinemas, sports and recreation clubs,

4. See Moura e Vicente (2007) on the life and works of Jackson do Pandeiro.

5. Song composed by Gordurinha and José Gomes.

gas stations and other modern buildings which needed to attract the public almost always adopted this form, in order to present an image of civility which would reflect the new times and the recent economic prosperity of the municipality. Art Déco in Campina Grande also became popular at a time of great dissemination of a series of innovations which were associated with eclecticism in other parts of the country, from the late nineteenth century onwards. The breakup with the colonial era construction (the result of sanitary demands), the more complex plans and roofing, the incorporation of greater technical advances brought by the industrial revolution and the introduction of a whole new domestic technology with the installation of mechanized water supply networks and sewage collection reinforced the modernist characteristics of this architecture in the local context (QUEIROZ, 2008).

Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, Campina Grande had built up a large impressive Art Déco heritage in areas of urban expansion, or by replacing a substantial portion of the ancient colonial-era buildings which predominated in the city center. Its Art Déco is representative of that modernizing period of Brazilian architecture and of cities and towns, as are the other major Art Déco works built in municipalities around the country, where the style became increasingly popular in the early decades of the 20th century. The most emblematic (or the most studied) cases are to be found in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Goiânia. Even decades later, what remains of this heritage is still impregnated with the scents, colors and sounds of the Jacksonian universe. These are some of the few Campina links between the 21st century and its memories, way of life and know-how of the first half of the twentieth century. All the wisdom and cultural development of the time is linked to architecture in concrete, commemorative and sentimental ways. Through lived experience, material and immaterial heritage become inseparable elements in the building of collective memory.

However, if the 1960s postcards gave the architecture of downtown Campina Grande a prominent position, by choosing it as a symbol of the city, the same did not happen in later years. Between 1970 and 1990, advertising took the place of architecture in the public arena. There was competition for visual space so the thinking was *the bigger the advertisement the better*. Contradictorily, the extensive use and competition for signings, banners and neon signs, in the middle of informal trade, with their grass-door sidewalk stands, plastic tarpaulins, wooden huts, etc.,

gradually did away with the architectural designs which had arisen to modernize the public space and reshape its image. This happened to such an extent that the city lost its links with the identity it had presented in the 1930s and 1940s, emblematic of its development process.

To coincide with the renovation of the façades of the central region, the first studies on Campina Grande Art Déco began. In the late 1970s, Lia Monica Rossi, Professor of Industrial Design at the Federal University of Paraíba (now the Federal University of Campina Grande), began her research, published articles and held exhibitions on the theme. Her work attracted the interest of both academia and the municipal government, and gave prominence to an expression of architecture hitherto forgotten locally and even nationwide. Art Déco was one of the most widespread architectural styles in the country, and also one of the least studied. In cities and towns across the country, rows of Art Déco homes occupied whole streets. Warehouses, flour mills and houses, decorated along the same lines, can still be seen in the northeastern countryside. For a long time, however, the so-called scholarship and hegemony of the modern movement has overshadowed other attempts at modernizing Brazilian architecture in those early decades of the twentieth century.

As a result of Lia Rossi's work, the municipal government perceived that a re-appreciation of the Campina Grande Art Déco heritage could be used as a means of stimulating trade in the downtown area, which was already losing customers to other less congested areas and could be converted into a tourist attraction, in association with other events organized by the municipality. In the same way that the identity of

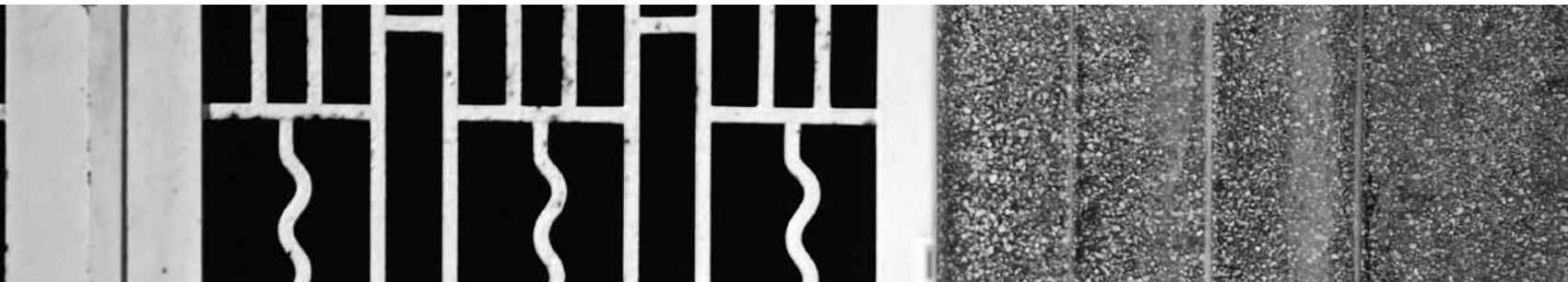
Campina Grande, Cidade de São João, had been established, they wanted to create the image of Campina Grande as the city of Art Déco. So, with this in mind, at the end of the 1990s, they set about promoting a program for the appreciation and conservation of their architectural heritage formed throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The program, called *Campina Deco*, aimed at revitalizing the downtown area, by substituting its overhead electrical and telephone networks with an underground network, laying new standardized sidewalks (with June festival themes), providing public amenities, relocating the street vendors who occupied public thoroughfares, controlling the use of billboards and restoring façades, most of which were in Art Déco (ABRANGÊNCIA...). With regard to the latter, the program envisaged a type of heritage restoration which would emphasize the scenic character of the façades, with a clear reference to the Art Déco of Miami Beach. The project was partially carried out, although it met up with certain difficulties due to subsequent administrations' unwillingness to continue with the project and the misunderstandings on the part of certain householders.

In 2004, the State passed a law, number 25,139, to protect the architectural work of the main streets of downtown Campina Grande, thereby ratifying and reinforcing the patrimonial importance they had been given in the *Campina Deco* program. Other buildings in different areas of the city were also covered by the law. As well as concern for the façades, other aspects of the buildings, such as their construction system, use of space and materials, and their relationship with the surrounding area were taken into consideration. However, the advances made with the enactment of this law can only be seen in proper perspective when

one realizes that a large number of properties were not covered by the law and also when the lack of harmony between the Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of the State of Paraíba (Iphaep) and the Municipality of Campina Grande is observed.

The Municipality of Campina Grande, because of its omission and backward vision, has been one of the key players in permitting the degradation of the cultural heritage of Campina Grande after the intense efforts and advances of previous years. Giving permits for demolition, building and renovation, without prior consultation with the Iphaep, and the lack of proper inspection of the work carried out on buildings eligible for protection has destroyed significant parts of listed buildings. As symptoms of this attitude, one can cite the demolition of concrete marquees, alteration of the door and window surrounds, substitution of the roof structure, use of materials incompatible with Iphaep requirements, elimination of ornamental elements and the placing of large signings and advertisements which once again hide the façades of buildings. To this can be added the lack of educational policies for the promotion of the cultural heritage of the municipality.

Just as Amorim (2007) proposed for the modernist buildings of Pernambuco, we too can write the obituary of the Campina Grande architecture of the first half of the twentieth century, with a long list of what has disappeared and what will disappear in time to come. Future generations run the risk of not having an opportunity to experience contact with the materiality of the past. The crisis of collective identity has begun! We no longer know who we are or where we have come from. During the June festivities, we revere architectural replicas of a past which we do not even know is ours. At the same time, our concrete references are de-materializing and with them a part of everything that is related to material heritage is being lost: reminders of use, spatial shapes, aesthetic standards, sounds, smells, clothing and gestures. And so, Campina Grande follows its tragic path of appreciation, devaluation, revaluation, heritage formation and oblivion.



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