

Brazil's Master Architect Niemeyer, 104, Was Active and Creative Till the End

Written by Marcos Carrieri

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Brazilian Architect Oscar Niemeyer died in Rio de Janeiro, at age 104. He had been in hospital for over a month, initially for dehydration, but later due to kidney and respiratory problems, worsened in recent days. Niemeyer, who would have turned 105 on the 15th, leaves as his legacy several architectural icons worldwide.

The style of his works always focused on curves. That is the case, for example, in the Modern Art Museum of Niterói, Oca, in Ibirapuera Park, in São Paulo, and in Planalto and Alvorada Palaces, in Brasília. Niemeyer also left his mark in Paris, New York, Turin and in the Arab world. In Algeria, some of his projects left the drawing board and came true. In the United Arab Emirates, in turn, his building designs are still only just on paper.

Niemeyer designed the Brazilian pavilion at New York World Fair in 1938-1939, alongside Lúcio Costa. From there, almost 20 years later, would arise a partnership to result in the creation of the new Brazilian capital: Brasília. While Lúcio Costa planned the Pilot Project, Niemeyer was responsible for the Square of Three Powers, Planalto Palace, Alvorada Palace, Itamaraty Palace and the Supreme Court. They are all his designs.

Before being called to design the buildings of the new city by then president Juscelino Kubitschek, the architect left his mark in other Brazilian cities. It was in Rio de Janeiro, in 1936, that the work of Niemeyer became renowned. That took place after a group of young architects collaborated with Le Corbusier in designing Gustavo Capanema Building, to be the headquarters of the Ministry of Education.

It was Niemeyer's suggestion to increase the main columns of the building from four to ten meters in height, not planned in the original design by the Swiss master. After that, Niemeyer received requests from all over the world.

In New York, he was a member of the team of professionals who designed the headquarters of

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the United Nations. Alongside his mentor, Le Corbusier, Niemeyer designed the buildings to host the Security Council of the General Assembly. Not, however, without many arguments about the final design the buildings should have.

In Paris, Niemeyer designed the headquarters of the French Communist Party, a political system he never abandoned. On the contrary, he was friends with controversial leaders, like the Cuban Fidel Castro.

The offices of carmaker Renault, in Paris, were also designed by Niemeyer. The drawings of the architect, born in 1907, in Niterói, also gained shape in Milan and Turin, in Italy, before reaching Algeria. In 1968, the architect traveled to the country at the invitation of then president Houari Boumediene. There, he designed five buildings for the University of Constantine. In Algiers, he designed the zoo.

Other projects the architect was commissioned for that did not leave the drawing boards were the Civic Center in Algiers and Algiers Mosque. The same happened with Leisure Island in Abu Dhabi, in the Emirates. Designed in 1981, the island would be a large theme park with an area dedicated to recreating some of the stories of the Arabian Nights. Another part would have a zoo. It would also include a third sector with hotels, shops, restaurants and a convention center.

The architect also designed the International and Permanent Fairgrounds of Lebanon, which was built, but never went into operation.

In 1988, Niemeyer received the Pritzker, the most important architecture award. The foundation that grants the honor said that Niemeyer had conceived a lyrical sculpture that expanded the principles of innovation of Le Corbusier to become a kind of free form of sculpture.

Niemeyer's lines were not restricted to buildings. Between 1955 and 1965, he edited technical magazine *Módulo*, which stopped being published due to the military dictatorship and that returned from 1975 to 1987, only then being closed for good. Niemeyer also signed furniture and shoe prints, wrote a novel and even poems.

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The architect married twice. From his first wedding, with Anita Baldo, he had just one daughter, Ana Maria. Anita died in 2004, after 76 years of marriage. Their daughter, Ana Maria, died in June this year, at age 82. In 2006, Niemeyer married once again, with Vera Lúcia Cabreira, his secretary, currently aged 65. The architect leaves four grandchildren, all the offspring of Ana Maria.

President Dilma Rousseff showed her sorrow in a statement. "His story is too large for the drawing boards. Niemeyer was a revolutionary, the mentor of a new architecture, one that is beautiful, logical and, as he himself defined it, inventive," she said. "Brazil has lost one of its geniuses today. It is a day to mourn his death. It is a day to celebrate his life," she added.

The president offered Planalto Palace for his wake, an offer accepted by the family. His body was viewed on Thursday, in Brasília and be buried in Rio de Janeiro, on Friday.

Anba