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Oscar Niemeyer's concrete saucer hosts a weekend of modernism in Rio

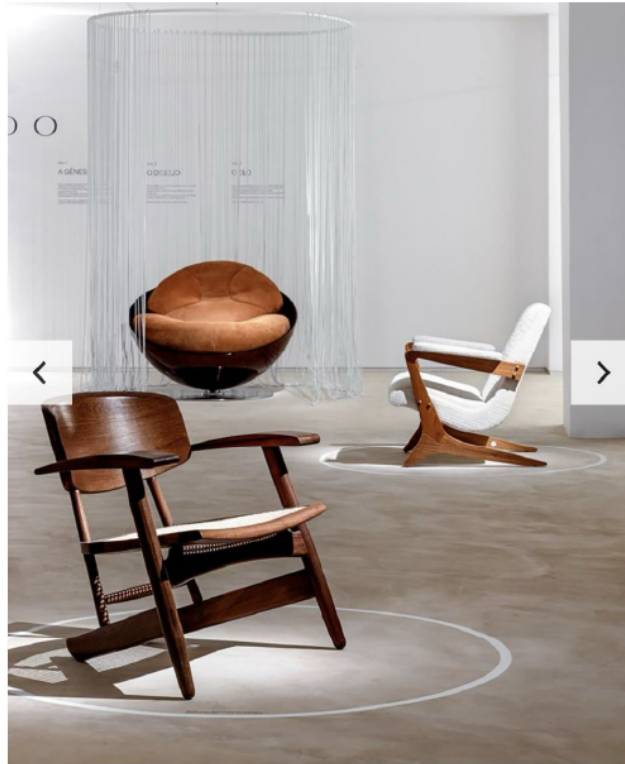
The exhibition juxtaposes early Brazilian modernism with contemporary design



Photography: © Denilson Machado, courtesy of Galerie Philia.

More than 60 Brazilian design objects inhabit the sweeping, futuristic architecture of Oscar Niemeyer's Museu de Arte Contemporânea Niterói in Rio de Janeiro this weekend. The free exhibition, 'Then and Now: Brazilian Legacy', presents an intergenerational dialogue between modernist and contemporary Brazilian designers.

For Galerie Philia, the international design and contemporary art platform that organised the event, 'Then and Now' offers a moment to 'reflect on the continuity of cultural expression in the face of vast societal and environmental change. 'The context has shifted from utopian optimism to ecological urgency,' says curator Ygaël Attali, 'but the conviction that design can shape how we inhabit the world endures. Together, these works exemplify the breadth of Brazilian design – intimate, monumental, sculptural and poetic.'



Fernando Mendes, Santos Dumont Armchair. Photography: © Denilson Machado, courtesy of Galerie Philia.

Early modernists like Lina Bo Bardi, José Zanine Caldas, Joaquim Tenreiro and Jorge Zalszupin used design to carve out a new national vision, while their contemporary heirs – including Aver, Dimitrih Correa, Hanna Englund and Alexia Vela Akasaka – are rather driven by sustainability, material research and the complexity of identity. Still there are many shared qualities among the oeuvres. 'What unites them is an ethic of material intimacy and craft,' says Attali. 'Whether it is Tenreiro working with native woods, Zanine Caldas carving salvaged trunks or Hugo França reclaiming monumental fallen trees today, there is a deep respect for the expressive potential of material.'

The featured contemporary designers engage with the modernist legacy 'not by imitating, but by reframing'. For example, Gabriela Campos names her furniture after Calder and Mondrian; Estúdio Orth nods to Brutalism through sculptural cast brass; Maximiliano Crovato references art deco and Italian maximalism.



Gabriela Campos, Calder Chair. Photography: © Denilson Machado, courtesy of Galerie Philia.

It was important for Attali to stage the exhibition within 'a manifesto of modernism', and Niemeyer's circular galleries at MAC Niterói 'create a rhythm that naturally lends itself to dialogue', he explains. 'We opted for interweaving modern and contemporary works rather than separating them, so that resonances and dissonances could be felt.'

The cadence of these conversations is amplified by the short weekend run of the exhibition: 'It becomes an event, a moment not to be missed, rather than a show one can always postpone visiting,' says Attali. 'This urgency heightens the dialogue between past and present – a temporary constellation that lives only in memory once it closes.'