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## Landscape scenarios from the lines-strokes of Georgia O’Keeffe and Lina Bo Bardi

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### Abstract.

The lines of the drawings by Georgia O’Keeffe and Lina Bo Bardi help us propose points of view that are still valid to analyze the landscape by creating new scenarios. In them, the near and the far that we explore eliminates the middle shot, which we observe unprecedentedly.

Through pairs, factories versus flowers, on the scale of objects, and the urban versus the rural, on the territorial scale, we find the keys to how the two authors of our essay built landscape scenarios. A capacity that helps us glimpse the way to face the landscape in this new century.

The tools that we will contemplate are the change of scale and the use of different and extreme dimensions. With them, Lina and Georgia find a new way of looking at the environment surrounding them, and they can offer us new scenarios with which to understand the environment in which we live. In her works, we discover two instruments of analysis for understanding the contemporary landscape.

**Keywords:** Landscape Scenarios, Objects, Georgia O’Keeffe, Lina Bo Bardi, Urban-Rural.

## 1 Introduction. Ways to keep your eyes open.

The comprehension of the landscape has evolved enormously in the twentieth century. We trace our research about this transformation through the eyes and lines of Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) and Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986). In their drawings and painting, we discover new ways of perceiving and performing shapes, boundaries, marks, or strokes. New perceptions about the understanding of the landscape could give us clues about how to proceed to it.

Two landscape elements were identified as crucial in the analysis and development during the twentieth century, objects, and territories. Through them, both artists establish a scenography relationship with the environment that surrounds them. Lina and Georgia connect with the terrain by exploring the potential of objects and territories in their drawings. We should note among their observation and intervention mechanisms:

the use of different scales and their distortion to create new scenarios; a singular and an unprejudiced gaze; and the mixture between abstraction and construction.

The performance of these three mechanisms could highlight in of objects and territories and the bearing between them. Through them, they construct a singular interpretation that encourages us to advance in new ways of relating to nature in the current century (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Georgia O'Keeffe. Pink Dish and Green Leaves. 1928. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

O'Keeffe and Bo Bardi studied and took their first steps into the artistic sphere in western cities, Georgia in New York and Lina in Rome and Milan; however, they found their creative place in trips to remote regions, New Mexico and northeast Brazil. The country that they find out was untouched through their view, very cut off from their occidental cities from where they came.

In 1945, O'Keeffe bought an abandoned adobe house in Abiquiu to rehabilitate it. In 1951 Lina planned and built her *Casa de Vidro*, two spaces that mix domesticity, work, and landscape. Both homes captivated us to newly imagined panoramas to travel. These female creators designed these houses from two radically different rituals of domestic behaviour, and they are divergent in most of their spatial proposals. However, the two houses share an establishment objective, the perfect relationship between the landscape and their rooms; the two intervened in the terrain to enhance it.

Georgia deployed a series of spatial ceremonies that connected her with the territory that surrounded her. They focused on her domestic stays: "Two walls of my room in the Abiquiu house are glass, and from one window, I see the road toward Española, Santa Fe and the world. The road fascinates with its ups and downs. Finally, its wide sweep as it speeds toward the wall of the hilltop to go past." [1] (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** 1. House in Abiquiu. n.d. 2. Abiquiu, bedroom of the house from the outside. n.d. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

In Jardim Morumbi, Lina built a *poetic home* as it was declared by Saul Steinberg [2]. Lina wanted to build a home into the exuberant Brazilian nature. When Lina spoke about their home, she emphasized the glazed hall of the thought structure, but in the same plane, she pointed to insects and animals, plants, trees, or flowers surrounding it. Since her first drawing of the project, she imagined a floating space in continuity with the jungle garden.



**Fig. 3.** 1. Lina Bo Bardi. First Study for the Glass House. 1951. 2. Living of the Glass House from its hall. n.d. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

Their houses are domestic objects that draw choreographies that bring us closer to the territories in which they inserted. In turn, both houses become news territories, welcoming the objects that populate their rooms.

Living and looking were equivalent experiences for our creators. We could observe this perception since they paint, draw, and design. They express and infuse in them their emotions with the landscape. Their work transcends representation and creates atmospheres. If one observes a road, a river, a mountain, or a city through their lines, he never sees it the same way (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** 1. Lina Bo Bardi. Drawing. n.d. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro. 2. Georgia O'Keeffe. Special 32. 1915. Source: Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Objects and territories appear very far apart due to their scalar difference. However, the territory has undergone a process of objectification throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We can consider an artefact built and ordered by the culture of the populations that settle in it. Moreover, it is the modern idea of considering the territory as a product, the starting point of our two creators. This point of view will be transformed over the decades, incorporating into its vision the need for collective memory lived on a topographic surface [3], a conception close to the thought of Lina and Georgia and that we could conclude with the corollary that there can be no territory without an image of the territory. The objects are no longer isolated elements in the background; now, they weave networks of relationships between them and merge with the settings that host them.

## 2 Factories and flowers. Objects.

They portrayed the transition in the transformation of cities between the 1920s when skyscrapers symbolized paradigmatic modernity, and the 1970s when metropolises personified the dehumanization of the landscape. They outlined paths of reconciliation between city and nature. For this purpose, they objectified the elements of a city and abstracted them. Buildings are objects in the city, like trees in the forest. They even become anthropomorphized; they relate to each other; flowers grow in them.

O'Keeffe moved to New York in 1918 and began to portray its skyscrapers. In 1932 he captured a canvas in which the buildings draw in an abstract and anthropomorphized mode, combined with figurative flowers (Fig. 5.1-2) [4]. Bo Bardi, decades later, designs a leisure and sports centre in an abandoned factory. She designs her logo in which

the old factory chimney, instead of smoke, throws flowers (Fig. 5.3), thus clearly announcing an ecological formula of architecture.



**Fig. 5.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. Manhattan, 1932. Source: Smithsonian American Art Museum 2. Georgia O'Keeffe. Sketch for Manhattan, 1932. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum 3. Lina Bo Bardi. Logo for Sesc Pompeia. 1986. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

They do not use figurative drawing per se but rather to approach atmospheres and landscapes: humid, lush, dazzling, or mysterious. O'Keeffe stated that: "Nothing is less real than realism. Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things.". Flowers become territories: "A flower is relatively small. [...] –nobody sees a flower –really– [...] –we have not time– and to see takes time [...]. So, I said to myself –I will paint what I see– what the flower is to me, but I will paint it big, and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it–" [5]. Georgia flowers are not only out of scale in terms of size, but they come out of frame; all their petals and stems are out of view of the viewer.

Both artificialize the flowers, O'Keeffe monumentalizes them in their scale, Lina converts flowers into objects and after in architecture.

Lina turns the flowers into furniture as the transposition of the Mandacarú flowers (Fig. 6.2-5) or a land plan, as the proposal of Camarupim, where the geometry of the settlement copies some petals (Fig. 7.2). The Mandacarú is a North-Brazilian cactus whose flower opens only one night and dies in the morning. Lina incorporates them into her architecture. She built a steel bar artefact in the railings of the sports building in the SESC Pompéia. A geometrized Mandacarú flower inspired her to build a large-scale exhibition object that interacted with the space.



**Fig. 6.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. White rose abstraction. 1927. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum 2. Lina Bo Bardi. Study for the booth "Flor de Maracujá" in Plaza Sé. 1986. 3. Lina Bo Bardi. Flower of Mandacarú SESC Pompéia. 4. Sketch, c. 1977. 5. Flavio Imperio Exhibition. Photo: Nelson Kon, 1997. Source 2-5: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

Bo Bardi was convinced about the influence of nature in design, as she stated, "the study of nature must be the first source of architecture" [6].



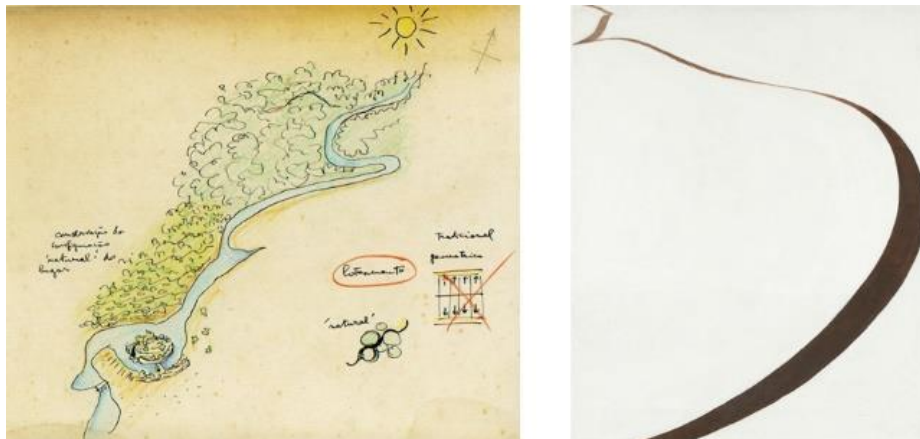
**Fig. 7.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. Red flower. 1919. Source: Norton Art Museum. 2. Lina Bo Bardi. Residential focuses for Camarupim. 1975. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

Close-ups of natural objects, usually represented in their paintings or furniture, transform into territories playing with the scale. These alterations allow us to observe the surrounded environment from a new point of view [7] (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 8.** 1. Alfred Stieglitz. Georgia O'Keeffe. Hands and grapes. Lake George. 1921. Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington. 2. Georgia O'Keeffe. Lawrence's tree. 1929. Source: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

Since 1960 both recovered their interest in drawing from a bird's eye view of rivers and roads in the field (Fig. 9). This aerial view made it easier for them to extend the scope field and the simultaneity of points of view. They incorporated the growing importance of control viewed from the air over the landscape into their work. The new situation brought their observation closer to that of the examination of maps, which allows conceptualizing the primary traces that transform territories.



**Fig. 9.** 1. Lina Bo Bardi. Itamambuca Complex. São Paulo. 1965. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro. 2. Georgia O'Keeffe. Highway in winter I. 1963. Source: National Gallery of Art.

### 3 The urban and the rural. Territories.

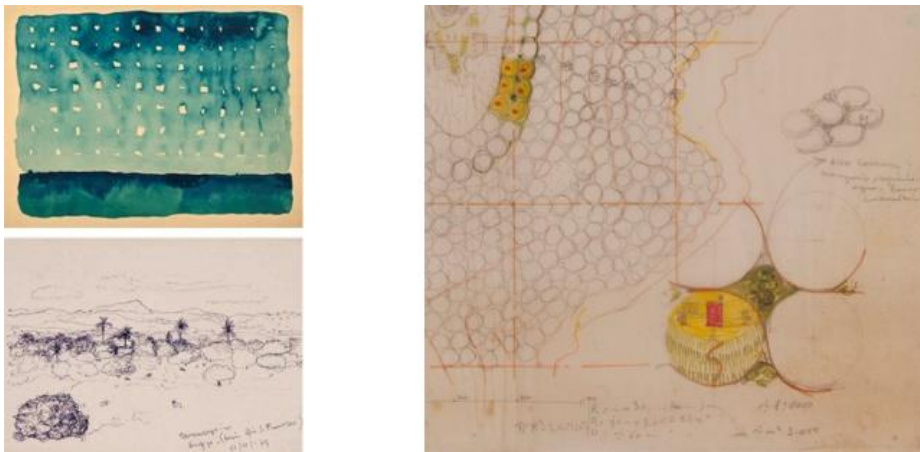
Bo Bardi and O'Keeffe incorporate into their drawings the collective imaginaries that belong to two very different societies, one with large open spaces covered with trees,

the Rio de Janeiro, and the other industrial, the New York (Fig. 10). Since their first drawings, both concentrate in their lines their fascination for these host cities.



**Fig. 10.** 1. Lina Bo Bardi. Getulio Vargas Square. Rio de Janeiro. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro. 2. Georgia O'Keeffe. The East River from the Shelton Hotel. 1928. Source: The Metropolitan Museum.

They introduce an indisputable complexity and yearnings for utopia: unreality, admiration, and a certain consolation in their urban pictures. However, this curiosity for the landscapes of the modern city does not diminish her interest in the rural world. Indeed, the landscape scenes of the countryside will be a place of decisive development for their work (Fig. 11). Collective memory evokes New York as a city of chimneys that coexist with the geometric masses of skyscrapers with a certain legendary air. In the Brazilian sertão, rivers and vegetation induce organic modulations.



**Fig. 11.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. Starry light night. 1917. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum 2. Lina Bo Bardi. Aim Camarupim. 1974. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro 3. Lina Bo Bardi. Camarupim parceling. 1975. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

Both captured and analyzed kind of infinite territory. The modern method of study orders cities and fields thanks to the matrix idea. In their first decades of work, they examined the imaginary lines that shape the rural and the urban terrains. With this deep



knowledge of the territory, they could propose new ways to confront it, understand it as a landscape scenario.

The lines of Lina and Georgia transcend the pretended exactitude of a topographer. These strokes contain a degree of objectivity in their abstraction. They transmit the essence of territory by including us directly into the portrait. Georgia could model the landscape with a pictorial technique, capturing the drama of the land [8]. On many occasions, critics nominate Lina's architecture as precise poetry. This lyric definition is accurate, and we can extend it to the approach to the territories of Georgia.

The portrait of the rural and urban landscapes instill enthusiasm for comprehending the rounded territory. They create the country scenario with just two lines, including beautiful compositions and oriental reminiscences. They represented a topography of the landscape by strata (Fig. 12).



**Fig. 12.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. The Barns, Lake George. 1926. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. 2. Lina Bo Bardi. Scenario for a tractor. São Paulo agriculture. São Paulo. 1951. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro.

#### 4 Conclusions. Landscape scenarios.

Lina and Georgia play with the scales of objects and territories to turn them into landscape scenarios. Their visual analysis shows a desire to decipher a matrix and metamorphose it.

They monumentalize natural objects that before their work seemed banal, like flowers and bones. "When I started painting the pelvis bones, I was most interested in the holes in the bones - what I saw through them - particularly the blue from holding them up in the sun against the sky" [9] (Fig. 13). These natures intercede in our gaze and keep our eyes open. They transform the natural object into territorial scenarios.



**Fig. 13.** 1. Georgia O'Keeffe. Pelvis with distance. 1943. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. 2. Lina Bo Bardi. Barroquinha Theater. 1986. Source: Mara Sánchez Llorens.

It is necessary to stop and look, to make a stop along the way if we want to contemplate the landscape and build a personal topography. The action of moving is just as important as choosing the right place to stop and think. Bo Bardi and O'Keeffe were accurate in both actions moving and standing. They chose points of view to stop taught us that another way of thinking about the territory is possible (Fig. 14).



**Fig. 14.** 1. Lina Bo Bardi in her chair by the roadside, São Paulo, 1967. Source: Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro 2. Tony Vaccaro. Photograph by Georgia O'Keeffe. 1960. Source: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

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