

Caravan-Será: The Future Yards of Creative Hospitality

Every day, Maria José de Figueiredo Ciríaco used to open the gates to her yard, between Pavuna and Campo Grande, and let local children in. There, among the plants, found objects and sensory experiences, she created the *Quintal das Artes* [Arts Yard] – a place for pause and invention. By naming this project *Caravanserá*, Gustavo Ciríaco not only pays tribute to his mother's hospitable gesture, but also proposes the possibility of viewing the Brazilian yard as a tropical variation on the age-old roadside inns known as caravanserais.

The origins of the caravanserai date back to the Achaemenid Empire (sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E). These buildings, whose name stems from the Persian *kārvānsarāy* [inn or palace for caravans], offered crucial points of hospitality. The typology became established from the third century B.C.E., and was particularly common from the tenth to the nineteenth century along the Silk Route.

The typical structure included an uncovered central courtyard, surrounded by arcades with rooms, stables, kitchens and prayer spaces. The courtyard was the place for socialising and exchanging goods, news and anecdotes. Travellers shared water, food and rest. Built at intervals of a day's journey, they ensured safety, shelter and a place to meet. Caravanserais occupied an ambiguous position: they were neither homes nor commercial establishments. Known as 'miniature cities,' they functioned as realms of culture and informal knowledge exchange.

The yards of Rio, which became a fixture between 1930 and 1970, echo that architecture. To the rear of the house – a place for rearing chickens, growing vegetables, washing clothes, praying, playing football, hiding, gossiping... – the yard was a sociable place. Sharing features with Afro-Brazilian gathering places and rustic farmsteads, it occupied an intermediary zone: private, but permeable; intimate, but collective. It was a place where neighbours and children were welcomed, where 'yard get-togethers' were held – gatherings, sambas, celebrations that spilled beyond walls of the living room.

Maria José, who described herself as a 'troubadour-witness,' was the one who established the connection between the yard and caravanserais. Like the caravanserai in the desert, her yard was a waypoint from which short journeys could be continued.

In that space – between the 70s and 90s – everyday activities became creative adventures: drawings, games involving cooler trolleys, and the 'sound cascade' of PET bottles thrown down the stairs to create improvised rhythms. Everything was consciously utilised: Maria José recycled materials that passed through the house – packaging, boxes, cardboard tubes, papers – transforming the ordinary into food for the imagination.

Moving spaces

The dialogue between Gustavo and Maria José echoes that of other creative genealogies. In the 1960s, Hélio Oiticica moved from his studio to the rehearsal hall of the Mangueira samba school, recognising within its quarters an embodied pedagogy. His Parangolés – cape-standards that demand bodily movement – stemmed from that coexistence with a community organised around creation. This was not a matter of ‘taking art to the people,’ but of recognising that the residents of Mangueira already produced a vivid aesthetics and ethics of existence.

Luiz Antonio Simas describes the streets of Rio as an ‘arena of improbable encounters.’ The yard that inspired Gustavo is part of that ecosystem of spaces of enchantment – territories where the ordinary and the extraordinary merge, growing plants, memories and ways of being in the world.

Gustavo’s *Caravanserá* carries with it the neo-concrete inheritance of participation and of the artist as someone who proposes experiences. The work exists through encounter, through the living presence of bodies. By recognising in the carnival parade a complete artistic structure – samba halls, collective essays, ephemeral culmination in the street – Gustavo proposes an aesthetic wisdom where hegemonic thought sees only a popular festival. The carnival does not imitate art: it is art that echoes life, blurring the boundary between creation and celebration. The ‘state of invention’ that Oiticica described at Mangueira – when collective creativity reached such intensity that everyone became a co-creator – is what *Caravanserá* seeks to establish.

In the carnival procession – especially in the parade by the samba school that Milton Cunha describes as a ritual in which ‘the dead start to sing’ – the past, the archaic and the mythical appear incarnate in the collective body. The schools draw inspiration from the carnival associations known as *ranchos* for the ritual naming and plot, creating a parade that makes normal time stand still. The future is anticipated in the gesture itself; memory is ‘de-archived,’ movement and crossing.

Between January and February 2026, workshops on dance, music, sewing and set design will open up CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian to the collective construction of a carnival parade. The gesture is a nod to the ever-open maternal yard and temporarily transforms the museum into an urban caravanserai, a space where time unfolds between memory and anticipation. In switching from mother to son, the hierarchy is inverted: it is not the yard that aspires to the museum, but the museum that incorporates the potentials of the yard – as a gathering place, a street corner, functioning on the premise of sharing. What Maria José cultivated in Rio, Gustavo is bringing to Lisbon as a parade.

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