

Inhotim: an unusual botanical garden

I visited the historic towns of Minas Gerais State in January 2016, as well as, with special interest, in Brumadinho, location of the Inhotim Museum Institute and Botanical Garden.

The Inhotim Institute is located at the banks of the Paraopeba River, in the southern metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte City (BH). It is a private property with 140 hectares of visitation area, which houses a botanical garden and a museum of contemporary art. The museum is the opposite of all rules of the conventional ones and it is distributed in several pavilions scattered around the property, acclimatised by the mysterious and beautiful local landscape that almost always awakens in the middle of a mist curtain, which only dissipates around midday.

It is not easy to get there, a place among mountains 60 km far from Belo Horizonte and 580 km from São Paulo City. Starting in São Paulo, it takes a full day drive by road. The other option is to take a plane to Confins Airport, drive to the center of BH, take a small bus and face 60 km road to Brumadinho.

Upon arriving to the Inhotim Institute, very soon the eyes catch the contrast, mainly the landscape inside and outside the institution. Inhotim is a world apart, an enclave of culture and refinement amid the poverty and urban chaos of the small towns nearby (Fig. 1, 2 and 3).

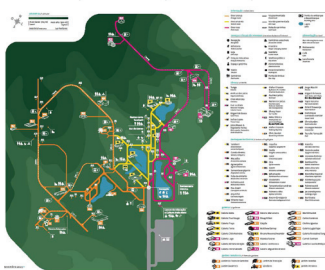


Figure 1 – Map of Inhotim, pointing out in blue, the four artificial lakes and three circulation axes: Orange, Yellow and Pink Axels.

Source: <http://www.inhotim.org.br/visite/mapa-do-parque/>

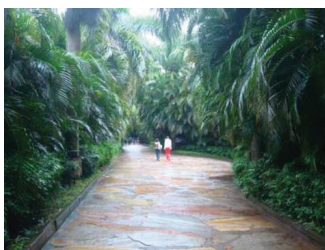


Figure 2 – Inhotim Institute entrance axes, covered with a mosaic of large slabs of stone and flanked by compact sets of palm trees.

Source: Author's photo



Figure 3 – The Inhotim Institute near the visitors' reception pavilion.
Source: Author's photo

According to Fernando Serapião, in the book *"Inhotim Architecture, Art and Landscape"*, the idea of creating a museum-garden was the initiative of its owner, Bernardo Paz, a successful businessman of iron and steel industry, which collected until the decade of 1.990 works of "modern art". At one moment, Paz got rid of the collection charmed by "contemporary art", which started considering as "the most authentic expression of intelligence in the contemporary world". The pivot of such transformation would have been the influence of the thought of his friend Tunga (Antonio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão), a contemporary artist born in Pernambuco State and grew up in Rio de Janeiro City, whose works are better known abroad than in Brazil.

Serapião wrote that Paz acquired the property in 1980 in Inhotim, the name of a small village, enchanted by an Earpod Tree (*Enterolobium Contortisiliquum*), nearly a century old at the time, planted by the former owner of the place. The interest and involvement of Paz with the flora enlarged under the influence of Roberto Burle Marx. After Paz having sponsored a book about his work, Burle Marx began to visit the property in 1984, who, in return, would have given the businessman some ideas for the site. According to the report, from that fact on Burle Marx became the patron of Inhotim landscaping without having ever designed anything for the site.



Figure 4 – Inside view of Educational Center Burle Marx Building.
Source: Author's photo



Figure 5 – View of the Green Roof on coverage of Educational Center Burle Marx Building with the work of the artist Yayoi Kusama entitled "Narcissus Garden Inhotim". Source: Author's photo

Just near the entrance stands the Educational Center Burle Marx (CEBM), an “U” shaped building, articulated by a living center, located almost inside one of the artificial lakes, which houses a library, an open air amphitheater, cafeteria, studios and an auditorium with 210 seats. According to the author, the CEBM was built to consolidate the educational vocation of the Institute, linking its activities to Brumadinho community. The CEBM complex offers training and qualification programs in the areas of the Institute’s activities. The roof of the building is a square shaped by a green roof and water mirrors, which is also a crossing bridge to the lake. Then it is possible to appreciate the work “Narcissus Garden Inhotim” (2009), of the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, which is composed by 500 stainless steel balls floating in the water mirrors and moving by the wind. The reference to this work is in another previous work of the artist, held in 1966 in the canals of Venice, as a protest against the Venice Biennale of Architecture (Figures 4 and 5).

Serapião emphasizes the influence of Tunga, who made Paz to shift the focus of his collection, making him the largest collector of contemporary art in the country. From that moment on, Paz started buying the surrounding lands to enlarge the site and open Inhotim to public, making it an OSCIP - Civil Society Organization of Public Interest. Inhotim currently carries three titles: as an area of environmental preservation and conservation – it’s an OSCIP, title of the Ministry of Justice; the RPPN Inhotim (Private Reserve of Cultural Heritage Inhotim) which has a remaining area of Tropical Semideciduous Montana Forest, of 145 hectares (in addition to the 140 intended for visitation); and the Botanical Garden of Inhotim, seal awarded by the National Commission of Botanical Gardens-CNJB in 2010, passing since then to be a membership of the Brazilian Botanical Gardens Network-RNJB.

The museum houses in its halls around 500 works by artists such as Cildo Meireles, Hélio Oiticica, Claudia Andujar, Chris Burden, Dan Graham, Olafur Eliasson and Adriana Varejão, among others, receiving about 400,000 visitors per year. Its maintenance and socio-educational programs costs reach about 35 million Reais per year. There are about one thousand workers at the Institute, most of them residents in Brumadinho and around. This fact caused a significant positive socio-economic and cultural impact to the city, which is now widely recognized by the City Authorities and other government agencies.

The Botanical Garden, the main focus of our interest, can be considered as occupying the whole visiting area of the Institute, presenting a total of 140 hectares of fairly busy morphology of land, with elevations ranging from 725 to 970 meters, where fits the micro basin of a tributary of the Paraopeba River, which feeds the four artificial lakes, of beautiful blue-

green color, made possible by the existence of microalgae. Mixed in with the watershed it is distributed to the land movement paths, oriented in three axels. The paths can be seen in a reading way from left to right from the entrance of the parking area and the main entrance, clockwise, being called: Orange Axis, Yellow Axis and Rose Axis. Along these axes are distributed the main attractions of the Botanical Garden and Museum, which can be visited on foot or using electric carts, driven by employees of the institution (Figure 1).

The land green cover is very heterogeneous, with native forest patches, replanted forest, eucalyptus forests, massive clusters of palm trees, both native and exotic, lawns and garden sets of ornamental and landscape effect.



Figure 6 – At left Mata Gallery among palm trees and pines of swamp, at right the True Rouge Gallery mirroring the lake.



Figure 7 – Work of Hélio Oiticica “Invention of Color, Penetrable Magic Square #, De Luxe” flanked by blue palms (*Bismarkia Nobilis*).

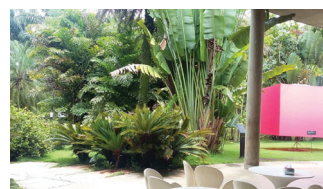


Figure 8 – Set of palm trees, cycads and trees of traveller ornamenting the cafeteria close the Fonte Gallery.



Figure 9 – Set of palm-blue species (*Bismarckianobilis*) - one of the botanical highlights in Inhotim.

Besides botanical highlights spread over the whole area, it can be enjoyed the following thematic gardens: 1 – Garden of the Senses; 2 – Desertic Garden; 3 - Transition Garden; 4 – Orchidarium (Vandário); 5 – Footpaths Garden; and 6 – Pictorial Garden. Excepted garden 6, which is located in the Yellow Axis, all other thematic gardens are concentrated in the Orange Axis.

In my opinion, the Botanical Inhotim Garden (JBI) is one of the most beautiful and well-kept botanical gardens in Brazil, becoming a reference in the current historical context. At the same time JBI incorporates several landscaping styles, but is not hold by any of

them. The fact of the Botanical Garden involve various Museum pavilions just increase its value, since its landscape and the architecture work together mutually and complement each other (figures 6, 7, 8 and 9).

The JBI visitor is led gradually and subtly along its axis, making the viewing of several landscaped scenery with its pavilions occur in unusual ways. Thus, the appreciation of each architectural work, which appears after every turn of the path, becomes a surprise for the hiker, transforming the visit into a discovery trip.

So, paraphrasing Serapião, the split of the works of contemporary art in several pavilions, became a new paradigm of exhibition spaces, making JBI a reference as botanical garden of the contemporary world by amalgamating that fragmentation in an unusual continuity of landscapes.

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