Exploring the Breadth of Brazilian Beaux Arts and Neocolonial Materials in the Fondren Collection

As a graduate student of Latin American Art History, I embarked upon an in-depth research paper for a seminar (HART 568) taught by Dr. Fabiola Lopez-Duran this past Fall 2012, which placed the ideological development of Brazilian neocolonial architecture within the Beaux Arts movement. My seminar paper was also greatly influenced by a class I was auditing on the city of Rio de Janeiro, co-taught by Dr. Fares El-dahdah and Dr. Alida Metcalf (ARCH/HIST 366). Over the course of my research, I had the opportunity to access the remarkable Brazilian primary sources held in the Woodson Special Collections, including Jean-Baptiste Debret’s (b.1768- d.1848) compendium, Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil, ou Séjour d’un Artiste Français au Brésil (“A Picturesque and Historic Voyage to Brazil, or the Sojourn of a French Artist in Brazil”) [FIG.1] ¹. I also made use of a wide variety of secondary and electronic sources held at the Fondren, such as the Andreatta Atlas [FIG.2], ² held in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) collection, which contains maps of modern urban developments in Rio de Janeiro.³ Overall, Fondren proved itself to house

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unparalleled research materials on Brazil, its Beaux Arts movement and its urban
development—a geographic area often underrepresented in university collections.

After developing an interest in researching the Beaux Arts architecture and
urbanism of Brazil, I met with the head librarian for the Fine Arts Library, Jet
Prendeville. She graciously introduced me to the Latin American History Research
Guide, and its special subcategory on Brazilian Studies, which was carefully compiled by
Rice University Librarian, Anna Shparberg. These extensive online Research guides
provided me with a full overview of the print and electronic resources available through
Fondren library connections, such as the electronic resources of affiliated institutions like
the Indiana University “Researching Brazil” Bibliographic index and the Biblioteca
Digital da Biblioteca Nacional do Brasil. After meeting with Jet Prendeville, I stopped
by the Woodson Research Center and Geographic Information Systems departments to
survey the unique Brazil-related primary source items held within these collections first-
hand.

The primary source Brazilian materials held in the Woodson Research Center
provided an extraordinary foundation for my research. This three-volume Voyage Pittoresque
et Historique au Brésil, ou Séjour d’un Artiste Français au Brésil relates Europe’s vision of
Brazil, its art, and its architecture. Published in France in 1834, the volume of original
etchings and text was fueled by Debret’s participation as a traveling artist with the Missão
Artística Francesa. Debret’s text and illustrations serves as a fascinating record of the
transition from colonial to neoclassical architecture via the Beaux Arts movement in Rio da
Janeiro, in addition to providing a picture of ethnographic, colonial constructs towards the
end of the nineteenth century [FIG. 3].
Debret’s primary source text served as a springboard for my analysis of the Beaux Arts architecture through secondary sources at the Fondren. After identifying the influence of Beaux-Arts and neocolonial movements in the city of Rio, I was able to use both print and electronic versions of the *Andreatta Atlas*, which is housed in Fondren’s Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Center. This rare resource—only held in the collections of a few university libraries across the globe—allowed me to survey the Beaux Arts urban development of the modern city of Rio from 1840 to 1906. The printed volume housed in the center also included a CD-ROM, which allowed me to download the complete map and texts for research reference. Next, I examined the Neocolonial architectural elements incorporated in the pavilions of Brazil’s Centennial in 1922 [FIG. 4], by surveying photographs available through interlibrary loan and online resources. This visual survey enabled me to interrogate the ambivalent relationship of the neocolonial style with the Beaux-Arts movement.

Together, these research processes and diverse sources allowed me to pinpoint the origins of the eclectic neocolonial style within the Beaux Arts movement, and trace its ultimate development into the Regionalist style that was advocated among modern Brazil’s intellectual elite.

My research also allowed me to identify that an early call for regionalism in the work of Brazilian scholar Gilberto Freyre, as seen in his *Manifesto Regional de 1926*. I discovered Freyre’s manifesto in the electronic archives of the International Center for Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—an exciting development that allowed me to connect the unique primary sources housed in Rice University’s Fondren collections with those of another major local cultural institution. My research at Fondren and local archives

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allowed me to clearly demonstrate that neocolonial architecture ideologically harkens back to the earlier Beaux Arts style and its structural framework that “naturalized” laboring, non-white bodies under European domination.

While my paper was critically shaped by the rich primary source material on Brazil housed in the Woodson Research Center, the thorough information systems in place at Fondren allowed me to access the secondary source content needed to craft my original research project. Fondren’s focus on the geographic region of Brazil is unparalleled among university library systems, providing access to rare books, maps, and scholarly texts that profoundly directed my thesis. Thanks to Fondren’s generously investment in primary and secondary materials on Brazil, I was able to conduct my exploration on the nature of neocolonial architecture and the Beaux Arts roots of this modern capital.
FIGURES:

[FIG. 1] Jean-Baptiste Debret, “Voyage Pittoresque et Historique de Brésil,” engravings, published 1834 and 1839, illustration of “two Brazilian houses.”