

# Architectural Record

"In Philadelphia, Isaac Julien Reimagines the Life and Legacy of Lina Bo Bardi Through Moving Images"

By Ilana Herzig

March 13, 2023



Tecnologia pré-histórica / Prehistoric Technology showcases Bo Bardi as played by Fernanda Montenegro at amorphous windows of SESC Pompéia from Lina Bo Bardi - A Marvellous Entanglement series that has accompanied other versions of the installation. Photo © Isaac Julien 2019, courtesy Isaac Julien, Victoria Miro, London; and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

**Review: 'Lina Bo Bardi—A Marvellous Entanglement' on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through May 29**

A swirl of red fabric flashes across a screen in a video installation, foregrounding the helical staircase of architect [Lina Bo Bardi's](#) Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia in Salvador, Brazil that mirrors the curving stairs opposite in the Frank Gehry-designed [Williams Forum at the Philadelphia Museum of Art](#). It is on one of a pyramid of nine screens there across which Isaac Julien displays the life and work of Italian-born Bo Bardi (1914–92), in an arrangement suspended within the cathedral-like space.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Entitled *Lina Bo Bardi—A Marvellous Entanglement*, the London artist and filmmaker's 40-minute video homage to this giant of Brazilian Modernism opened in late January and runs through May 29.



*Um maravilhoso emaranhado / A Marvellous Entanglement captures Fernanda Torres at SESC Pompéia.*

*Photo © Isaac Julien*

Interweaving past and present, *A Marvellous Entanglement* showcases Bo Bardi's unorthodox architectural forms in Brazil, as well as her various manifestos on everything from design to politics. The video—scored by German-Spanish composer Maria de Alvear and edited by Julien's longtime collaborator Adam Finch—revives Bo Bardi's works as props, dialogue, and stages for theatrical presentations in the multiscreen video installation.

Born in Rome as Achilina di Enrico Bo, the architect, designer, and scenographer—known for her humanist design approach and bold forms—championed functionality and adaptive reuse. Her projects span the Brutalist Social Service of Commerce (SESC) Pompéia (1982), a drum factory turned multiuse cultural center; Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (1960), a project relocated to a 17th-century colonial estate; the glass and concrete São Paulo Museum of Art (1968); the street-theater inspired Teatro Oficina (1994); and Restaurante Coati (1990), the "modern ruin" of a housing complex and café perched on what was deemed the Slope of Mercy by enslaved Africans in Salvador.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Portrait of Isaac Julien in 2017. Photo © Thierry Bal, courtesy the artist

"I wanted to make a poetic meditation on her work," says Julien, "a film that would emerge from the process of filming itself." Julien first encountered Bo Bardi's work in the 1990s through the Goethe Institut, which would later grant him entry to the previously inaccessible Coati and then, more formally, in 2012, when he showcased his installation grappling with geography and identity, *Geopoetics*, at SESC Pompéia.

Julien reinterprets Bo Bardi's architecture in São Paulo and Salvador through performances by actresses Fernanda Montenegro and her daughter Fernanda Torres, Brazilian art collective Plataforma Àràkà, and Balé Folclórico da Bahia dance company. Against the backdrop of SESC Pompéia's cave opening-inspired windows or Oficina's narrow, scaffolding-lined corridor, the Brazilian mother-daughter duo reenact the Modernist's musings on the complexities of museum spaces. Within the corrugated concrete of Restaurante Coati, Àràkà and choreographer Zebrinha portray Bo Bardi's meditations on "Poor Architecture" and simplicity of form using clay and mirrors. Upon the wooden steps of MAM-BA, Julien's team directs the spiraling motion of Balé Folclórico dancers.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508





Julien's reimagining of Bo Bardi's Restaurante Coati with Fernanda Montenegro as Bo Bardi in *Soluções inventadas / Solutions Invented* and performers of Plataforma Àraka in *Almas belas, almas menos belas / Beautiful Souls, Less Beautiful Souls*. Images © Isaac Julien

Clips of archival elements are interspersed with the performances, elucidating Bo Bardi's response to Afro-Brazilian diasporic histories and the slave trade as well as engaging with Julien's reparative reinterpretations. Footage of Pierre Verger's 1950s photographs of Bahian culture projected on billowing textiles and Candomblé religious processions interlace with images of the 1964 fascist military coup in Brazil and artist Goya Lopes's commemoration of Black queer activist Marielle Franco, killed in 2018.



Julien's *Sem começo nem fim / Without Beginning or End* showcases Bo Bardi's glass and concrete exhibition displays at São Paulo's art museum. Image © Isaac Julien

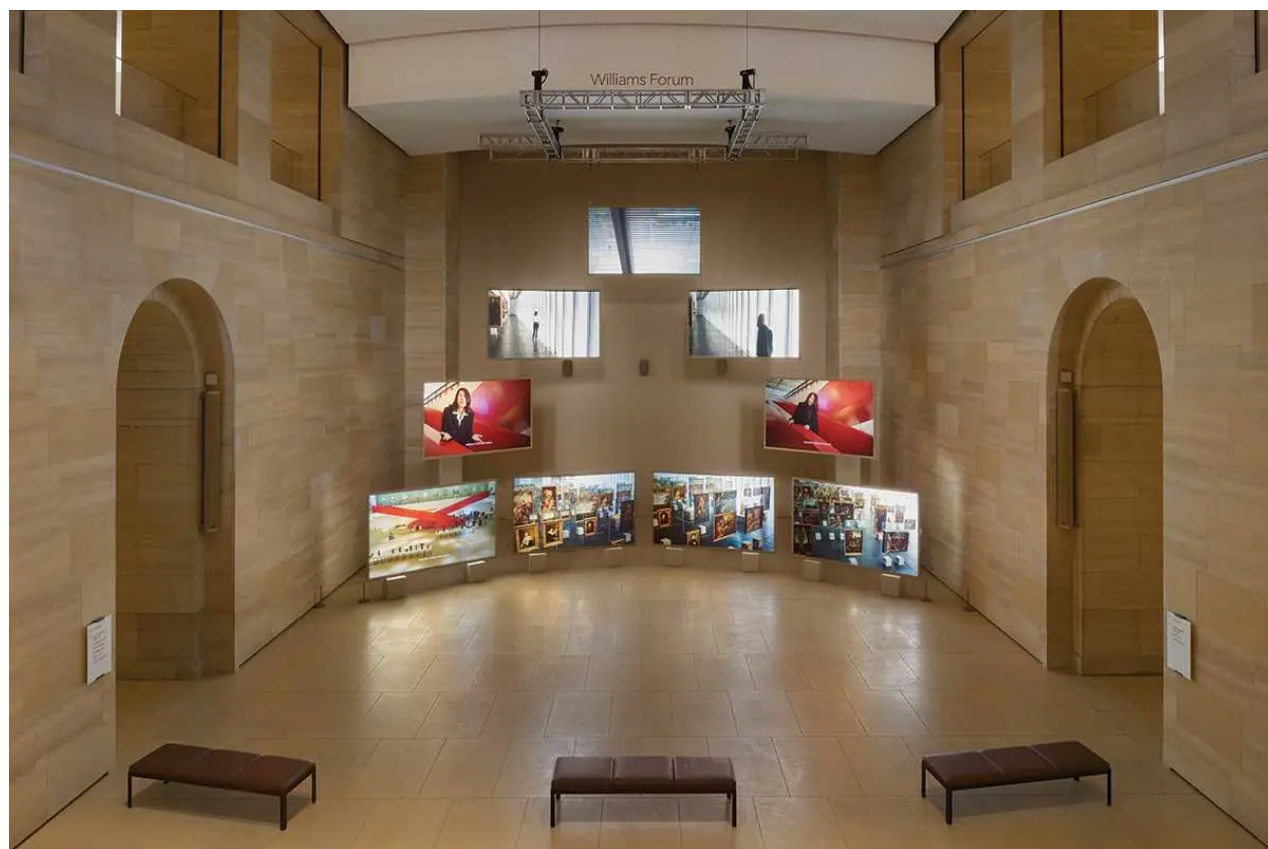
**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

*Entanglement* introduces a conversation between architects and forms. Parallels emerge between communal spaces that invite everyday integration with art, sinuous stairs, and porous apertures contributing to a sense of place. According to PMA curator of contemporary art Erica Battle (who curated the exhibition alongside curatorial fellow Swagato Chakravorty), Bo Bardi's revolutionary exhibition displays at São Paulo's art museum—glass easels buttressed by concrete plinths—also informed *Entanglement's* arrangement of screens, suspended from theatrical rigging or supported by wood blocks at the Williams Forum. "We tried to work site-specifically," says Julien, "with the verticality of the atrium to reveal more of the choreography and to highlight, pictorially, the curvature of the stairs and presentation of the screens."

Julien's installation reimagines Bo Bardi's adaptive-reuse projects, in conversation with Gehry's work at the museum, incorporating new themes and introducing those excluded from institutional histories. His tribute to Bo Bardi excavates the architectural history of her adopted country, reanimating projects she constructed while adding his own art forms and actors to reclaim and reveal once-obfuscated narratives.

"The real Lina Bo Bardi has an enigmatic presence in the work," Julien says. "Through our research, reconstruction, and performative rearticulation, we tried to contemporize her for a new audience."



Julien's multi-screen installation on view at the PMA. Photo by Timothy Tiebout, © Isaac Julien

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508