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Carnival Designers Room

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Samba school parades underwent major transformations throughout the twentieth century. From the earliest decades, their strength lay in Samba music, dance, community participation, and street presence.

Simultaneously, artists affiliated with the schools were already exploring ways to express stories, territories, and popular experiences using costumes, sculptures, panels, and Carnival floats.

One of the pioneers of this visual art form was Miguel Moura, a Black painter, sculptor, and set designer trained at the Escola de Arte Bernardelli (Bernardelli School of Arts).

Connected to Samba and Carnival since the 1930s, he was one of the founders of Depois Eu Digo, a school from Salgueiro Hill that helped establish today's Acadêmicos do Salgueiro Samba School. He also collaborated with schools such as Vila Isabel, Unidos da Tijuca, and Salgueiro, as well as with ranchos ("Carnival pageant groups") and major Carnival



societies.

In 1935, Miguel Moura was responsible for the visual design of Depois Eu Digo's parade, "Uma manhã no Salgueiro, no berço do samba." ("A morning in Salgueiro, in the cradle of Samba"). An illuminated panel depicted Salgueiro Hill and its houses. Samba School sections featured women carrying water, clothes, and firewood, while Samba artists played their instruments. A large cradle symbolized the birth of Samba. Costumes, Carnival floats, characters, and landscapes all contributed to telling the story of the community's life.

Miguel called his art "simple truth." His paintings and Carnival creations depicted the daily lives of Black people in favelas, suburbs, dance halls, terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious temples), and samba circles. His career demonstrates that the schools' visual language also emerged within the communities, shaped by the work of Black artists who had firsthand knowledge of the territories and experiences represented on the parade avenue.

This transformation reached a new dimension at Salgueiro in 1959 with Dirceu Nery and Marie Louise Nery. The two visual artists created the parade “Viagem Pitoresca e Histórica ao Brasil,” (“Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil”) inspired by the work of Jean-Baptiste Debret. The presentation made history for the school through its elaborate costumes, Carnival floats, and imagery that guided the public through the theme.

In the early 1960s, Fernando Pamplona and Arlindo Rodrigues advanced this process at Salgueiro. Pamplona, a professor at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (National School of Fine Arts), highlighted themes related to Brazilian popular culture, Black history, and figures excluded from official narratives. Arlindo brought his experience with theatrical set and costume design, helping to organize the parade’s visual narrative.



As competition and rivalry between schools intensified, the theme increasingly guided each school's presentation. Costumes, Carnival floats, theme-Samba, choreography, and sections began to be planned together. Through this process, the role of the Carnival designer was established: researching the theme, organizing the narrative, guiding the visual creation, and ensuring the parade's artistic unity.

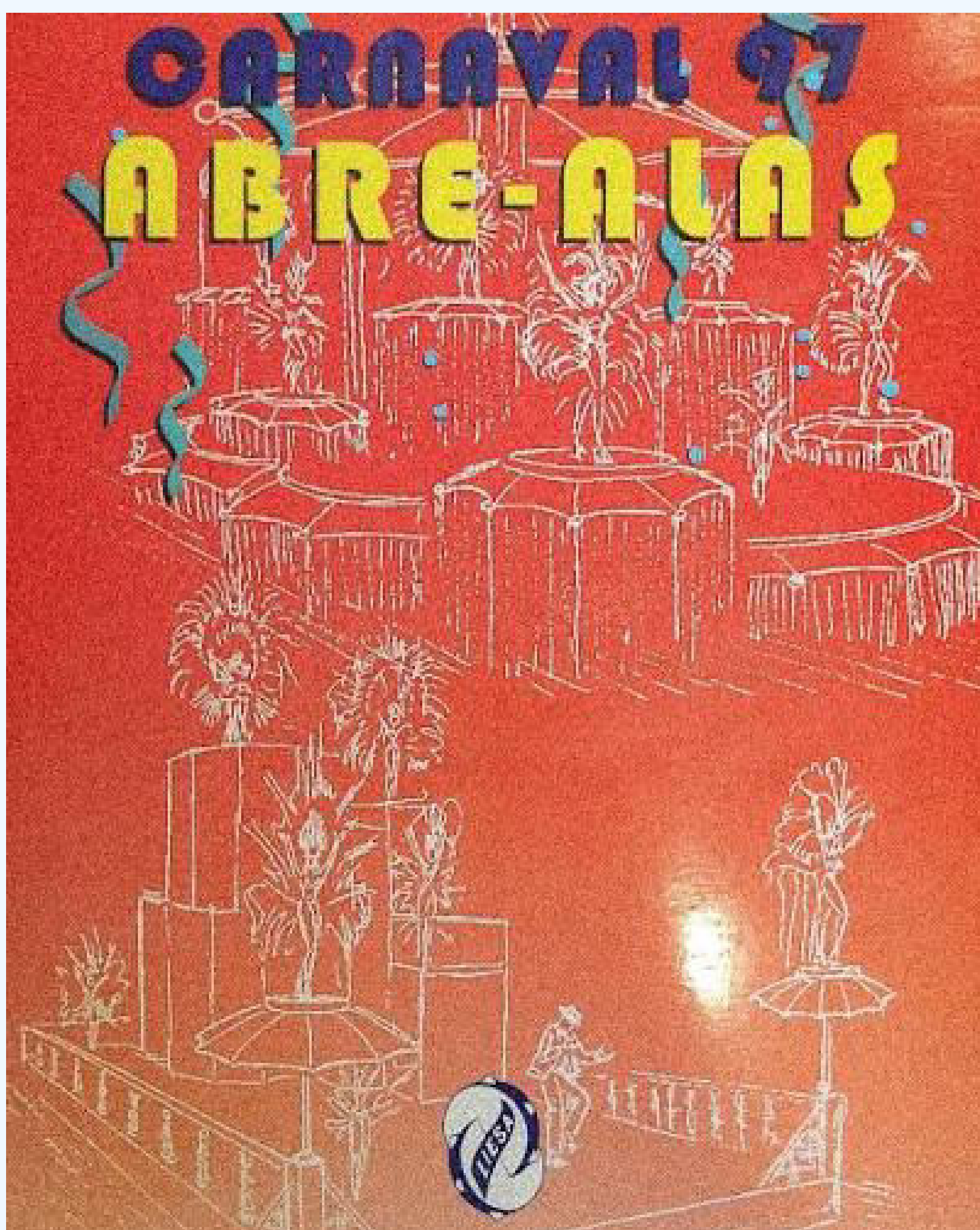
Other creators expanded this language over the following decades. Maria Augusta Rodrigues helped train a generation of artists engaged in a dialogue between research, visual arts, and Carnival. Rosa Magalhães became known for her historical rigor, visual craftsmanship, and the creation of detailed themes. Lícia Lacerda was part of this lineage, contributing to parades distinguished by narrative depth and theatrical ingenuity.

Joãosinho Trinta elevated the monumental scale and visual impact of parades to another level, particularly during his time at Beija-Flor Samba School. In 1989, with "Ratos e Urubus, Larguem Minha Fantasia" ("Rats and Vultures, Let Go of my Costume"), he created one of Carnival's most iconic images: the Beggar Christ. Covered by court order and accompanied by the phrase "Even forbidden, watch over us!", the sculpture became a symbol of social criticism, cultural resistance, and artistic freedom.

Sketches, synopses, prototypes, and Abre-Alas

(Opening Float) books allow us to follow part of the creative process. The synopsis organizes the narrative of the theme. Sketches show the designs for costumes and floats. Prototypes test shapes, volumes, materials, and finishes. The Abre-Alas book compiles technical, historical, and artistic information that guides the presentation and helps judges understand the parade.

By observing these materials, we understand that a Samba school is born from a combination of memory, imagination, research, planning, craftsmanship, and collective decisions. Each drawing represents a stage of the journey until the story takes shape, gains movement, and finds its voice on the parade avenue.



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10 am to 6 pm

Fridays and Saturdays

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Cidade do Samba – Gamboa

Warehouse 14



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