

THE NEW PAULISTA MOVEMENT

BY SULEMAN ANAYA

BRAZIL'S MEGALOPOLIS MAKES OLD WORLD URBANISM, NIGHTLIFE AND RUNWAYS LOOK... SMALL.

São Paulo is a bizarre urban phenomenon: it pulsates with a momentum matched by no other city on the continent other than its great North American twin, but it is strangely center-less, woefully lacking in strong individual signifiers or an instantly marketable image. It lacks Mexico City's historic magnificence, Tokyo's commercial futurism or the luster of Hong Kong. There is no Eiffel Tower, no Central Park, not even an ugly TV tower or main square to orient the foreigner and reassure the returning local. It is just, it seems, a sprawling, disordered mass of relentless urbanism, stamped to the infinite with those faceless beacons of Twentieth-century optimism: skyscrapers.

Yet what São Paulo is missing in symbolic markers it makes up for in density, in a still-disarming take on modernity, and in its ultra-cosmopolitan population's ability to absorb global influences – cultural, gastronomic and otherwise. The city combines the motorist disposition of Los Angeles with the decayed complexity of a Mediterranean capital. Its incomparable architectural landscape – an uncontained sea of concrete, superimposed verticality – dominates any experience of the city. Seeing the Copan building, that undulating

1960s residential experiment, rise out of the tight-knit fabric of downtown São Paulo is one of the great apparitions of the Twentieth-century urban landscape. And today, Brazil's largest city is the only financial mega-hub of the Southern Hemisphere, an economic powerhouse that drives the current Brazilian miracle and, as a result, a major destination on international art, fashion and design itineraries.



Maurício Ianês, *In-1 (Ineffable)*, 2010

The plurality of influences that have informed the city – Portuguese melancholy, megalopolitan folly, BRIC-country entrepreneurial optimism – flavors its vast daily commercial and artistic output, as well as its leisure subcultures. As an example, the fashionable *boîte du jour*, Lions Nightclub, would fit right in with Paris' current hotspots in terms of its crowd, décor and service. But step outside onto Lions' huge balcony and a romantic, apocalyptic *tableau vivant* rises before you that is uniquely of this place: a view of the old city's skyline, dominated by the back of the Cathedral da Sé surrounded by São Paulo's typical jumble of high-rises. The brutal beauty of the

collage-like built environment is further charged by a sense of insecurity: despite various personal and institutionalized precautions (ATMs don't give out cash after 10pm), the possibility of danger hovers over any activity in São Paulo, which can be as exhilarating as it is a dampener. Incongruities such as these – in addition to the sci-fi backdrop and the dynamic economy, the ethnic diversity, high crime rate, and sensually immersive aesthetic – are what make São Paulo the creative hotbed it has become.

Visual artist and stylist Maurício Ianês personifies São Paulo's current dynamism and promise. The 37-year-old has been making art since 1998, creating a body of work as defined by language as by its absence, in a constant exploration of the idea of saying less to express more. His contribution to the 29th São Paulo Biennial was a dialogue-based performance piece entitled "Glossolalia", and earlier this year, he blacked out passages from Maurice Blanchard poems for a show at Galeria Vermelho, an epicenter of progressive culture in São Paulo. But that's only half the story. In his parallel profession as the stylist and creative soundboard behind Brazil's most important contemporary fashion designer, Alexandre Herchcovitch, Ianês has artistically co-directed every Herchcovitch collection. It is a collaboration that has produced unforgettable runway shows in São Paulo and, since 2004, New York.

Ianês' dual mode of operation is representative of the New Paulista mindset: his outlook is resolutely international but indebted to the cultural lineage of Brazil; he is committed to a serious intellectual practice while successfully pursuing a commercial career, operating in art and fashion while maintaining integrity and credibility in both realms. People like Ianês define São Paulo's potential as a cultural capital for the 2010s. But underneath their remarkable individual stories, it is the collective energy and character of the city that feeds its current power to "boom."