

# International Memory of the World Register

Acervo arquitetônico de Oscar Niemeyer

(Brazil)

2012-39

## 1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

Oscar Niemeyer Foundation proposes the candidacy of its documentary collection, which consists of sketches, drawings, and album of the architect Oscar Niemeyer produced from 1938 to 2005.

The collection consists of 8927 documents, with boards of sketches sets, boards of architectural albums and boards of technical drawings which form a valuable record of the work of an artist who marked the international architecture of the twentieth century.

The sheer size of the set of documents and the fact that it covers not built projects of Oscar Niemeyer (often the only record of these), makes this collection an invaluable asset to be preserved.

However, in addition to primary research sources, many of these documents are true works of art. The sketches and albums are original documents, rare and almost entirely, unique. They not only bring traces of free curves and poetic that marked the work of Niemeyer, but also revealed the architect's working method.

Niemeyer produced albums to present his projects and he used them in the very process of creation. He designed his projects and wrote what he called "Necessary Explanation." In this process, he matured and validated his creation.

## 2.0 Nominator

### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

**Fundação Oscar Niemeyer (Oscar Niemeyer Foundation)**

### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Fundação Oscar Niemeyer is the legal custodian of the entire documentary heritage of Oscar Niemeyer and holds legal title to all rights in connection to the architect's name, image, voice, signature and visual representations, as well as to the copyright and the trademark of products related to his work as per the Public Deed for the Assignment of Copyrights, Image Rights Management, registered at the 16th Office of Notary Public Records of Rio de Janeiro, book SL-44, p. 157-158, entry 126, of 17 April 1996, and Amendment Deed, registered at the same Office of Notary Public Records, book 2975, p. 112-113, of 9 December 1996.

### 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

**Carlos Ricardo Niemeyer de Medeiros**

### 2.4 Contact details

Name	Address	
Carlos Ricardo Niemeyer de Medeiros	Rua Conde Lages 25 – Centro Rio de Janeiro – RJ – CEP – Brazil	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
55 21 2509-1843	55 21 2509-1843	<a href="mailto:carlosricardoniemeyer@niemeyer.org.br">carlosricardoniemeyer@niemeyer.org.br</a>

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### 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

#### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If Inscribed, the exact title and Institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Acervo arquitetônico de Oscar Niemeyer  
Fundação Oscar Niemeyer

#### 3.4 History/provenance

##### BIOGRAPHY OF PRODUCER

Oscar Niemeyer was born in Rio de Janeiro on December 15, 1907, to Oscar Niemeyer Soares and Delfina Ribeiro de Almeida. In 1934 he attained his undergraduate degree from the National School of Fine Arts, also in Rio. Soon after that, Niemeyer went to work at the studio of Lucio Costa and Carlos Leão, where he joined the staff commissioned with the design of the Ministry of Education and Health building, and where in 1936 he worked in close contact with Swiss architect Le Corbusier. Niemeyer's first design built to completion was the Obra do Berço building, in Rio de Janeiro, which followed principles of Corbusian theory such as the use of pilotis, free span and *brise-soleil*. In 1939 he traveled to the United States with Lucio Costa, whom he was to join in the collaborative design of the Brazilian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, a work that disclosed Brazilian modern architecture to the world. However, it was only with the Pampulha Complex, designed in 1940 under commission of Belo Horizonte mayor Juscelino Kubitschek, that formal originality and freedom were to definitely earmark Oscar Niemeyer's architectural style based on the exploration of curved, free-flowing forms, and resorting to the plasticity of reinforced concrete. Starting with the Pampulha, Niemeyer proceeded with a prolific production for which he created his own vocabulary: slabs with unexpected contours, inclined façades, V-shaped pilotis, and increasingly broader spans.

Niemeyer received international recognition for his participation in the design for the United Nations Headquarters (New York, 1947), which was followed by the Copan residential tower (1951) and the Ibirapuera Park complex (1951-1954), in São Paulo, besides his Rio de Janeiro residence, named Casa das Canoas (1952), among many others. In 1955, after having executed several projects in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, he founded *Módulo* magazine (1955-1987), specialized in art and architecture. In 1956, Niemeyer accepted the commission from Brazil's president Juscelino Kubitschek to contribute the architectural design to Lucio Costa's urban plan for the new Brazilian capital. The architect accompanied the construction of Brasília through to its dedication in 1960. He designed tens of public, residential and commercial buildings, among which the residence of the president of Brazil (Palácio da Alvorada) and the presidential executive offices (Palácio do Planalto), the Supreme Court building, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice buildings, the National Congress and the Cathedral. After setting a major milestone in Oscar Niemeyer's career, today Brasília showcases numerous seasoned elements and themes that characterize his body of works such, as for example, formal monumentality, the harmonious dialogue between the straight line and the curve, the lightness of the architectural design, the great free spans, the free-flowing and sculptural forms, the investigation of the structural possibilities of reinforced concrete, and the perfect integration of architecture and the visual arts.

As an active member of the Brazilian Communist Party, which he joined in 1945, Niemeyer went into exile in 1964 after the military took over the government of Brazil, and he started what became the principal phase of his work abroad. During this period he developed projects in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the United States, among which the headquarters of the French Communist Party (Paris, 1965) and of the Mondadori publishing house (Milan, 1968); Constantine University (Algeria, 1969); and the Le Havre Cultural Center (1972-1973) deserve special mention.

Niemeyer returned to Brazil in the late 1970s and in the early 1980s he had received commissions for projects in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. For the latter city, he designed yet another

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monumental complex, the Memorial da América Latina (1987), in which he stresses themes of political and social nature. Between 1997 and 2007, the architect conceived nearly 100 projects that include the Museu Oscar Niemeyer, in Curitiba (2001); the Niemeyer Way (1997), in Niterói – a development that houses the Museu de Arte Contemporânea, which he had designed a few years before (1991) –; the República Cultural Complex (1999); the auditorium at Ibirapuera Park, in São Paulo (2002); the Itaipu Power Plant Complex, in Foz do Iguaçu (2005); the Centro Cultural Principado de Astúrias, in Spain (2006), and the University of Sciences and Information Technology of Havana, in Cuba (2007).

Oscar Niemeyer holds a decisive and singular place in the history of world architecture. He has been awarded tens of prizes and decorations that include the Pritzker Architecture Prize (USA, 1988), the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale (1996), the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1998), and the Order of the Honorable Legion (France, 2007). He is a member of numerous professional and cultural societies, and author of several publications and nearly 600 projects. Niemeyer is an active architect who continues to innovate and influence architecture in Brazil and abroad.

Oscar Niemeyer's archive is composed of 468 sets of sketches, totalling 2165 boards; 259 architectural albums totalling 1806 boards; and 1018 sets of plants, with a total of 4956 boards. It contains original files and copies obtained at the architect's office in Rio de Janeiro and Paris.

The sketches are a record of the architect's creative process and reflect his intention and intuition. There are sketches of speculation, in which the architect considers alternative hypotheses until reaching the final shape; sketches of disclosure, in part explaining and justifying the project; and sketches that guide the execution. In Oscar Niemeyer's archive, the first two types predominate, in addition to those prepared to illustrate publications and lectures, activities for which he has also been devoted throughout his life. In this set, the original predominate over the copies, and there are 141 architectural projects of Niemeyer represented in it and numerous studies of shapes.

The architectural albums are designed with the objective of presenting the project to the client. They also have exceptional value for the study of the architect's creative process, since they are composed of sketches and explanatory texts concerning the solutions found and the proposal developed by the architect, to account for the architectural program. In general, they are presented in the form of sets of small loose boards and they have varied dimensions. The originals predominate over the copies. In the set, there are 176 architectural projects created by the architect.

The sets of plans gather technical drawings produced in the phases of studies, preparation and submission of the project and the phases of construction and acceptance of the work, in addition to those elaborated during the life of this, for maintenance and renovation. In the collection of architectural documents of Oscar Niemeyer's archive, there are sets of plants relating to 206 of his projects, and most plants (708) belong to the preparation phase, in which facades, sections, floor plans and location of the building above ground are detailed, among others. Prevail in this set of copies - many with handwritten interventions of the architect.

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## 4.0 Legal information

### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address
Fundação Oscar Niemeyer para Fins Culturais	Rua da Glória 25 – Centro – Rio de Janeiro – RJ – CEP Brazil

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55 21 2509-1843	55 21 2509-1844	fundacao@niemeyer.org.br

### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address
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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
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### 4.3 Legal status

Fundação Oscar Niemeyer is the legal custodian of the entire documentary heritage of Oscar Niemeyer and holds legal title to all rights in connection to the architect's name, image, voice, signature and visual representations, as well as to the copyright and the trademark of products related to his work as per the Public Deed for the Assignment of Copyrights, Image Rights Management, registered at the 16th Office of Notary Public Records, book SL-44, p. 157-158, entry 126, of 17 April 1996, and Amendment Deed, registered at the same Office of Notary Public Records, book 2975, p. 112-113, of 9 December 1996. An accessibility policy covers the documentary heritage of the Oscar Niemeyer Archives constituted by sketches, albums and drawings. It determines the obligations arising from this right, which include caring for the preservation of said heritage and making it available for public consultation with a view to educational, research and dissemination purposes, in abidance by the conditions proposed by Oscar

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Niemeyer. At present, consultation in the architectural archives is made available to researchers by appointment and depending on the subject and purpose of their research. Only photo reproductions of documents are allowed, provided that the original archive material(s) is/are in good condition.

#### **4.4 Accessibility**

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The collection can be accessed with restrictions. It is open to researchers upon previous scheduling and information about the purpose of consultation.

The access to the collection is restricted for reasons of preservation and security of documents. Previous scheduling is also required because of physical limitation of the area of Oscar Niemeyer's Foundation and the demand for large spaces in order to access large format documents.

A project of treatment and digitization of the collection with a budget of U\$ 500,000 is in the process of raising funds with tax incentives from the Ministry of Culture. The project goal is to increase accessibility to documents, making them available through the website [www.niemeyer.org.br](http://www.niemeyer.org.br), through consultation of query terminals of the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation branches and cultural products like books and exhibitions.

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#### **4.5 Copyright status**

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### **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

#### **5.1 Authenticity.**

The documents of the Foundation's collection are authentic and produced by Oscar Niemeyer and collected directly from his office.

#### **5.2 World significance**

*Oscar Niemeyer's work has a decisive place in the architectural history. Of the approximately 600 projects designed by Oscar Niemeyer, 342 are represented in the collection of Oscar Niemeyer Foundation. It is the most complete existing collection of Niemeyer's work.*

*No other collection brings together such significant volume of documents. They are rare, mostly unique and, in many cases, the only existing reference about projects that were not built.*

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### 5.3 Comparative criteria:

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

#### **1 Time**

Oscar Niemeyer, who is still active at the age of 104, was a character who witnessed and participated actively in a century of the history of Brazil and of the world.

In architecture, his work and influence go beyond the modernist movement that marked the beginning of his career in the 30s/40s. His architecture passes through several phases: the construction of Brasilia in the 50s/60s, his exile abroad in the 60s/70s, his return to Brazil in the 80s and its latest phase, from the 90s. The last 20 years have been a fertile period of intense creation, in which Niemeyer presents us with projects like the Museum of Contemporary Art in Niterói (MAC), Museum of Curitiba, Centro Cultural de Avilés (Spain) and Serpentine Gallery, among others (See Appendix General Information).

#### **2 Place**

Architecture is probably the art that has more power to mark a place.

In Brazil, where Niemeyer's architecture is present it has become a symbol of the city. Brasilia (Cathedral, National Congress, Department of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs); Sao Paulo (Copan Building and Ibirapuera), Curitiba (Oscar Niemeyer Museum in Curitiba), Belo Horizonte (Conjunto da Pampulha and Administrative City), Rio de Janeiro (Passarela do Samba), Niterói (MAC - Museum of Contemporary Art). (See Appendix General Information)

Niemeyer's work is not limited to his country. Outside Brazil, the architect realized projects in Spain (Centro Cultural de Aviles), Italy (Mondadori Publishing House headquarters, Auditorium Ravelo), United States (UN Headquarters), France (Le Havre, the French Communist Party Headquarters, Le Humanite), Cuba (Square of Science and Technology University, Algeria (Constantine University).

#### **3 People**

Niemeyer was an active character of the twentieth century, having lived with many characters and participated in many moments in history: the architect Le Corbusier, Andre Malraux, Pablo Neruda, Jean Paul Sartre, the Cuban leader Fidel Castro, the musicians Vinicius de Moraes and Tom Jobim creators of Bossa Nova, to name a few. (See Appendix General information.)

In his work, we can find several records of political and social movements in Brazil and the world, mainly through sculptures of protest: Torture Never Again Monument; Monument IX November (in honour of workers killed in a strike in Volta Redonda - Rio de Janeiro in the period after the Brazilian dictatorship); Sculpture of the Latin America Memorial; Monument Eldorado Memória in honour of the peasants of the Movement of the Landless killed in the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás (Marabá - PA); Embargo Against Cuba Monument (University of Cuba square); JK Memorial, in Brasilia that during the right-wing dictatorship put a sculpture resembling the sickle and hammer, the symbol of communist, in the capital of the country; Monument to the Libyan Man (Libya - not built), Monument to Peace (Moscow, Russia - not built).

#### **4 Subject and theme**

Oscar Niemeyer has a unique and decisive place in architectural history, having been honoured with dozens of awards and honours, such as the Pritzker Architecture (USA, 1988),



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the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale (1996), the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1998) and the Commendation of the Legion of Honour (France, 2007). Author of some 600 projects, Niemeyer revolutionized modern architecture by proposing a more free and imaginative architecture.

In his early career, Niemeyer's talent is revealed through his collaboration with Lucio Costa's team and the Swiss architect Le Corbusier in the project of the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro (1936-43). This project is an architectural landmark and helps the affirmation of modernism as a movement of global reach.

With the Conjunto da Pampulha (1942-43) and its original architecture, of curved lines and the plasticity of concrete, Niemeyer challenges the excessive rationalism dominant in that time. It is the beginning of a new architecture capable of causing surprise. The modern Brazilian architecture draws worldwide attention.

Niemeyer's International recognition is consolidated when he had his proposal for the United Nations Headquarters in New York, chosen as the basis for the final project along with Le Corbusier (1947).

In Brasilia, Oscar Niemeyer creates a monumental architecture on such a scale and of such importance that later helped the Brazilian capital to be the first modern city to be considered World Heritage. His work occupies a definite place in the history of world architecture.

Many famous architects in the world claim the importance and influence of Oscar Niemeyer and his work, as Zaha Hadid (Iran), Charles Gwathmey (USA), Richard Rogers (United Kingdom), Harry Seidler (Australia), Renzo Piano (Italy).

## **5 Form and style**

The documents that compose the collection of the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation are examples of a way of working that are falling into disuse, with supports and instruments that are being replaced by computerized tools. Today, architects and designers are increasingly using software such as AUTOCAD and other technological resources.

Niemeyer's collection consists, entirely, of hand drawn documents in paper or similar.

In addition to this, the album and sketches of Oscar Niemeyer are true works of art that bring the design and unique trace of an artist, with a brand and personal style and also a method of work that, unlike other architects of his contemporaries.

## **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:**

### **6.0 Contextual information**

#### **6.1 Rarity**

The sketches and architectural albums from Oscar Niemeyer's Foundation collection are documents hand made by Niemeyer, originals, rare and unique. Some similar sketches, from most famous projects, are found in other collections.

The technical drawings are rare and in many cases unique.

## **6.2 Integrity**

The documents of the collection of Oscar Niemeyer Foundation are part of a single collection, gathered in one place, belonging and being guarded by a non-profit institution with a mission to preserve this heritage.