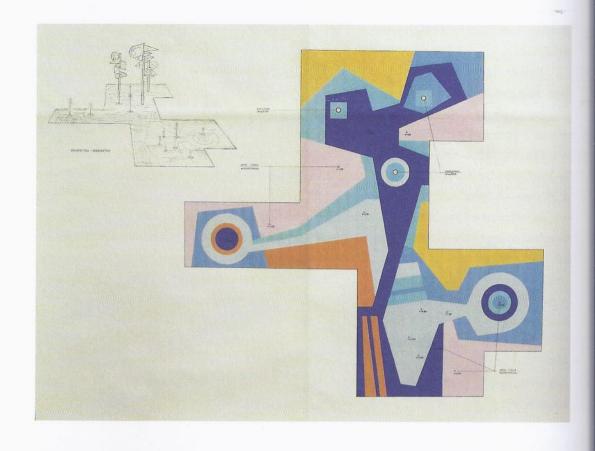


Kabbalistic roll with an illumination of the sefirot, 1604. Scribe: Jacob Hebron, Paris. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

future. "Nevertheless," as the landscape architect Theo Hoffjann notes, "the draft was rejected by many in German professional planning circles, and generated unease." The press, too, was critical, arguing that it did not fit the place. "The bird's-eye view rendition, created in collaboration with the German firm [Lenhoff and Partners], gave an impression of sterility uncharacteristic of his work." In February 1994 the project was halted. The square was later restored to its historical form.²⁷

At the same time that Burle Marx was working on the design for Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, he was also involved in a project for Israel, the Garden of the Tree of Life. This second unbuilt green space was a collaboration with the Brazilian Jewish artist Sulamita Mareines and her son, the architect Ivo Mareines. The seed for it had been planted in 1991 by Itzhak Shefi, then Israeli ambassador to Argentina, who had seen Burle Marx's work in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He had approached Sulamita Mareines to suggest that the two artists might work together on a garden for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Mareines selected a site on the school's Mount Scopus campus, overlooking the Old City. The garden was conceived as a place for contemplation, whose paths would all lead to spaces of peace, meditation, and encounter. The overall concept, envisioned by Mareines, was based on the Jewish mystical doctrine of the Kabbalah, which teaches that God rules the universe through ten creative forces, or sefirot, and that these emanations intervene between the Ein Sof, the infinite unknowable God, and the world. These esoteric notions are graphically articulated in a diagram or "tree of emanation": on the right are the forces associated with Hokhmah

Perspective drawing and design for the pool, Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, 1993 (unbuilt). Gouache on paper, 35% × 49 in. (90.5 × 124.5 cm). Burle Marx & Cia., Rio de Janeiro



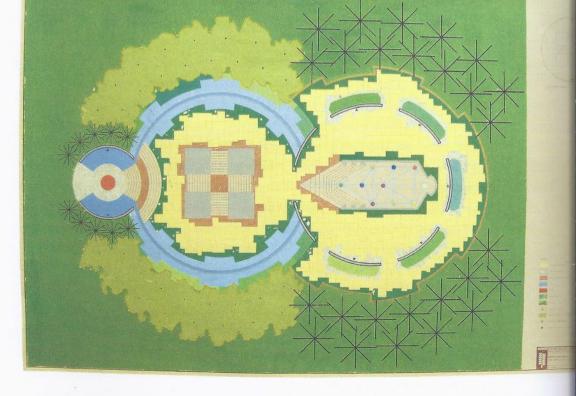
a colorful pavement in black, gray, white, and reddish concrete, with patterns that never repeat themselves (page 85 top). The approach was reminiscent of his recent work for Miami's Biscayne Boulevard (pages 82–83). Facing the Volksbühne, he designed a fountain with a multicolor tile panel at the bottom of the basin and thin standing sculptures with colorful banderoles. Flanking the theater on the east there was to be a large sand playground, surrounded by greenery, while on the west he planned a smaller square within the square: a Jedermann-Platz (square for everyone), with plantings and murals done in ceramic panels. The design was a major gesture in recognition of Berlin's recent, historic reunification, a gathering place in the heart of a city that had been for too long divided.

Toward the end of their stay in the city, Burle Marx's family took an apartment in middle-class Charlottenburg (the center of Berlin's nightlife at the time), home to many German-born Jews. The artist's father, Wilhelm Marx, was, like most German Jews, highly assimilated, in contrast to the Eastern European Jews in the Scheunenviertel. He loved German culture and transmitted his passion for literature and music, especially Wagner and Beethoven, to his children.²⁵ Despite Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the consequent increase in antisemitism, the family apparently continued to feel at home. Roberto's brother Walter was a pianist, conductor, and composer; in 1934 he played concerts on tour in Germany, including directing the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra.²⁶

Given Berlin's importance in Burle Marx's artistic formation, it must have been particularly meaningful for him to have the opportunity to leave his mark in the city at the end of his life. But it is typical of his outlook that he chose a design that looked to the

(wisdom), Hesed (mercy), and Nezah (eternity); on the left are the sefirot of Binah (understanding), Din (justice), and Hod (glory). While the right side is viewed as a positive confluence of forces, the forces on the left, if unchecked, can lead to evil. The middle column, with Tiferet (glory or beauty) at its center, represents the ideal balance of all forces.³⁰

The final design for the Garden of the Tree of Life called for four circular spaces on a descending slope, surrounded by dense vegetation. A surviving model and garden plan in gouache, dated April 1994, reflect a previous version with three circular sections.31 Access to the garden was to be through allées of cypresses, evergreens commonly found in the Jerusalem hills, leading to the uppermost and smallest circle, surrounded by reflecting water pools and semicircular walls decorated with stone and ceramic panels on a flooring of white Portuguese stone. A lit flame at the center of the first circle was envisioned by Mareines as an interruption of daily concerns, focusing the visitor's attention on the coming experience and allowing for a better perception of the garden as a whole. A set of steps led to the second section, with four large cubical glass sculptures at the center, to be created by Mareines, representing the four elements-earth. fire, water, and air. These were to stand on a pavement of red Portuguese stone, surrounded by a "water curtain" cascading down to semicircular pools. Burle Marx did a number of pencil studies for this area, including sketches featuring seven-branched menorahs. It was to be ringed by beds of native flowers and olive trees-one of the seven species named in the Hebrew Bible, and a tree strongly connected by tradition to Israel. The third and largest circular level was surrounded by palm trees, with benches



Design for the Garden of the Tree of Life, project for Hebrew University of Jerusalem, concept by Sulamita Mareines, 1994 (unbuilt). Gouache on paper, 35½ × 55½ in. (90.1 × 140.3 cm). Burle Marx & Cia., Rio de Janeiro

where visitors could contemplate a panoramic view of the Old City of Jerusalem. The Kabbalistic diagram of the Tree of Life was to be inset in a sunken area at center, flanked by waterfalls and with its shape delineated by waterways. A fourth component, the Hall of Peace, was later added. This was to be a small underground amphitheater, meant for meditation and gatherings. A ray of natural light was to guide the visitor's eye to a glass pane set in one wall and running from floor to ceiling, through which would be visible a majestic vista of Jerusalem. Unlike other projects by Burle Marx, the overall design of the garden was highly symmetrical, unfolding along a vertical axis that emanated from the Kabbalistic diagram at the heart of the garden.

Throughout the design process for the Tree of Life Garden, the planning was done by Burle Marx and his studio together with Sulamita and Ivo Mareines, all based in Rio. David Reznik, the Brazilian-born Israeli architect of the Mount Scopus campus, provided information about the site as needed. Burle Marx never traveled to Jerusalem for this project.

Although the design process progressed at a good pace, changes in administration at the Hebrew University led to dwindling support for the idea. An alternate plan was created in May 1993 for the Tree of Life design, to be sited in an extensive garden belonging to Sulamita Mareines in Rio de Janeiro's Floresta da Tijuca area, one of the largest urban forests in the world. Her passion to see the project built in Israel did not abate, however. After Burle Marx's death in June 1994, his studio continued to discuss the project with David Reznik in Jerusalem. Two years later, the project was presented in an exhibition of Sulamita Mareines's work at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro. Entitled "Water, Earth, Fire, and Air: The Magic of the Name," the installation included the four sculptures she had designed for the project, architectural drawings, and the model.³²

Shortly before his death, Burle Marx undertook one more project deeply charged with Jewish meaning: a set of relief-sculpture panels to be set on six pillars in the synagogue of the Congregação Judaica do Brasil. Located in Barra da Tijuca, on the outskirts of Rio, the temple is commonly known as the Sinagoga Bonder, after its longtime leader, Rabbi Nilton Bonder, a Brazilian author and a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The synagogue, a former house, was remodeled by Ivo Mareines in 1994, with a garden designed and planted by the rabbi's wife, Esther Bonder.

The renovation preserved six existing four-sided pillars at the center of the synagogue. Mareines recalled noticing "that they were in the exact position of the six sefirot from the most common representation of the Tree of Life." Seeing this, he decided to incorporate the Kabbalistic diagram into the overall design of the synagogue by tracing it on the wooden floor, so that the pillars were linked visually. Burle Marx then created twenty-four carved panels to be placed on these columns. The abstract decorations represent the sefirot—wisdom, mercy, and eternity on one side; understanding, justice, and glory on the other. The panels are a unique occurrence in Burle Marx's oeuvre, more drawn and flattened than sculpted, as opposed to the highly sculptural works the artist had designed beginning in the late 1960s. It is interesting to compare them with the concrete panels for Santo André's Municipal Theater, for example, or the rear facade of FIESP, a





Congregação Judaica do Brasil Synagogue, Rio de Janeiro, 1994. Interior showing the Tree of Life design in the inlaid wood floor and Burle Marx's cast-cement panels on the pillars; detail resembling the Hebrew letter he

commercial building and theater, and the mural for the headquarters of Banco Safra, both in São Paulo (page 99). In a space imbued with Kabbalistic meaning, the pillars' abstract patterns read as a sort of mystical language. At the eastern end of the synagogue, the Torah ark stands in the place of the *sefirah* called *Keter Elyon*, or Supreme Crown, which is found at the top center of the Tree of Life and represents the highest divine emanation that can be perceived by humans. The *bimah*, or reading desk, is placed in front of the Torah ark, between the two pillars representing wisdom and understanding. Burle Marx designed the panels for the synagogue in Barra da Tijuca to honor his father's Jewish heritage. The fact that the artist worked on five sites steeped in Jewish meaning almost simultaneously between 1991 and 1994 speaks to his late interest in his own Jewish identity, and perhaps to a certain need to leave a personal mark in the world at the end of his life. Unlike his most celebrated creations, such as the pavements for Copacabana's Avenida Atlântica and his monumental design for Rio's Parque do Flamengo, most of these late projects are rather intimate.

The Barra synagogue, in particular, has a beautiful site, surrounded by vegetation and with majestic views of Rio's verdant hills. Burle Marx's sculptural pillars anchor the interior both visually and spiritually. "Probably that is what gives this small space its mystical atmosphere," Mareines has said. And that may be why the Hebrew letter *he*, signifying God, seems to emerge from one of the pillars amid Burle Marx's abstract vocabulary. In Kabbalah the *sefirot* are rendered not only as the schematic tree, but also in the form of a human figure. This dual depiction of Jewish mysticism's famous diagram is a fitting image for Burle Marx, the twentieth century's great lover of fruitful gardens made for human lives. Having branched out into the world through his myriad creations, at the very end of his life he turned inward in search of his own roots.