

# VIRUS12

## RADICAL MODERNS

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## A FLOWER BETWEEN THE STONE AND THE CRYSTAL

**Renato Anelli**

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Few modern architects were as radical as Lina Bo Bardi was. So I understood the invitation I received from *VIRUS* journal to write about one of Lina's staircase designs to MASP, the Sao Paulo Museum of Art, as an opportunity for this essay, which brings to discussion some ideas on the interpretation of her work.

As a plant, this staircase would grow from the soil until piercing the concrete and glass parallelepiped, in the upper part of MASP. The contrast between organic form and Cartesian volume catches the eye in the drawings and model, until the architect chooses a "small, which is not auric" staircase, as she herself claims in her testimony to the filmmaker Walter Lima Jr. in 1972, in the documentary "Architecture, the transformation of space."

Stairs were always conceived by Lina Bo Bardi as special forms, never limited to a merely functional problem. After all, besides the four huge pillars of the structure that supports the upper volume over the square, on the ceiling of the lower volume, only the elevators pit closure in tempered glass and the staircase in concrete have a presence in this open space, extending the Paulista avenue plan as plaza and terrace to the valley of the Saracura stream.

If, in the final version, the stairs are set up as a kind of pulpit for public space created by the museum partition, the original version would create an *objet à réaction poétique*, as proposed by Le Corbusier in 1929. That it was conceived as an interpretation of a living organism, a plant, is no minor issue. Unlike the circles, sinusoids and curves of the cups, guitars and bottles populating the paintings of the young Charles Jeanneret, the figure is clearly a reference to a plant, a vegetal organism.

In the extended period of time - from 1957 to 1968 - that lasted the building design and construction processes, Lina transformed herself intellectually speaking, questioning the values that guided her early built work. After designing the living room of her home in Morumbi district as a suspended volume composed of concrete slabs and floor-to-ceiling glass closures, elevated from the ground by very slender pillars of steel pipes, Lina is immersed in an investigation on the Brazilian nature and culture. She visits Burle Marx farm-nursery garden, makes excursions to the inland learning about different habitats, registers Vila Velha rock formations, gathering images which would return in several of her projects, interpreted by her traces of illustrator and set designer.

In a letter of April 1956 written to her husband Pietro Maria Bardi, then in Italy for the production of a book, Lina states she would not make again a house like theirs, known as the Glass House. She would prefer "a house with a stoned wood-burning stove, with no windows and a large park around, overgrown. The seeds, I would throw them in the wind in the woods.". In the same year, on her way back from Italy, she stops in Barcelona and visits Gaudi works. Returning to Brazil, she writes to her friend Bruno Zevi demonstrating her enthusiasm with the Catalan architect work saying: "'Gaudi: the plan does not exist in nature' may be the epigraph of the new architecture."

For the new building of MASP, Lina expands the experiences of elevated and transparent volumes that she had performed both in her own home and in the study of a museum on the beach of San Vicente. Transparency allowed in the first and, if built, would allow in the second, the equivalence between work of art and natural landscape, as they would be in a continuous space with no partition between inside and outside. In the first studies, the elevated volume of MASP appears with opaque facades in the art gallery and ribbon windows at its bottom corner. These facades would have rustic coating, probably in stone with inlaid vegetation, as in Valeria Cirel and Chame-chame houses.

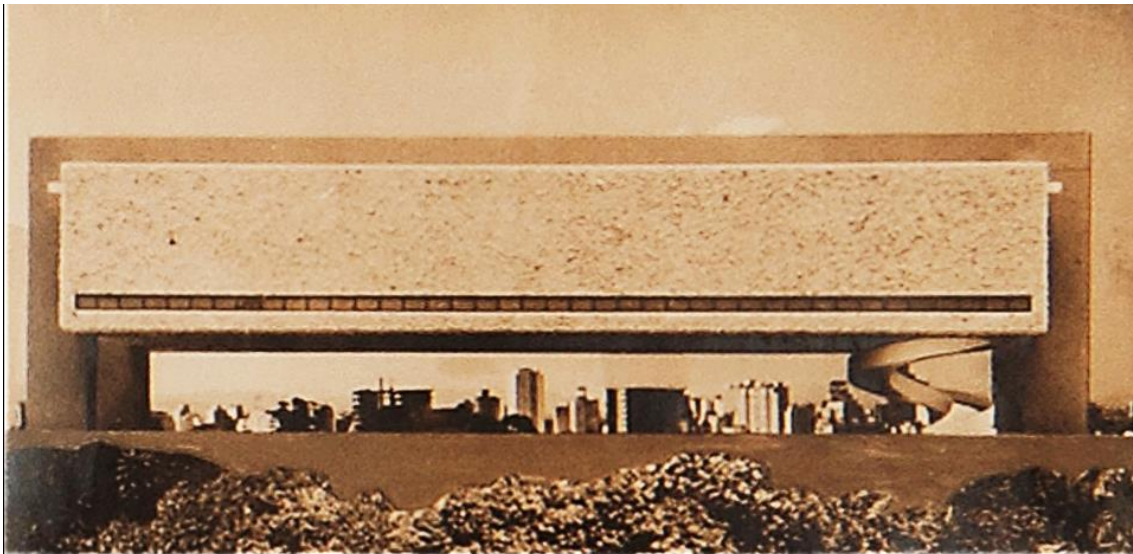
The "plant" staircase arises in sketches of that time. The only study that notes the date points to the year 1960. The expressive drawings of the first studies are too slender for a public staircase. Still, several forms are developed for this idea. As narrow and wry steps, the pieces of ferrocement, inspired by the work of Pier Luigi Nervi, would be assembled sequentially in a special ascending, accentuating in the construction system the interpretation of a plant organism.

Studies have been developed to find the proper proportion to the circulation of people expected attending the museum. It approaches the proportions of the Ministry of Education and Health staircase in Rio de Janeiro (1936-1943), but not enclosed into a cylinder. In contrast, even though wider than in the original studies, the stairs new version wants to express the upward movement of the lower surface offering itself in the clear span as a helical plan that unfolds within the empty space. It comes here closer to folded surfaces of Max Bill tripartite units, exhibited in Sao Paulo years earlier. Drawings and model incorporate this staircase. Only in 1965 drawings, the final version built in "L" can be seen.

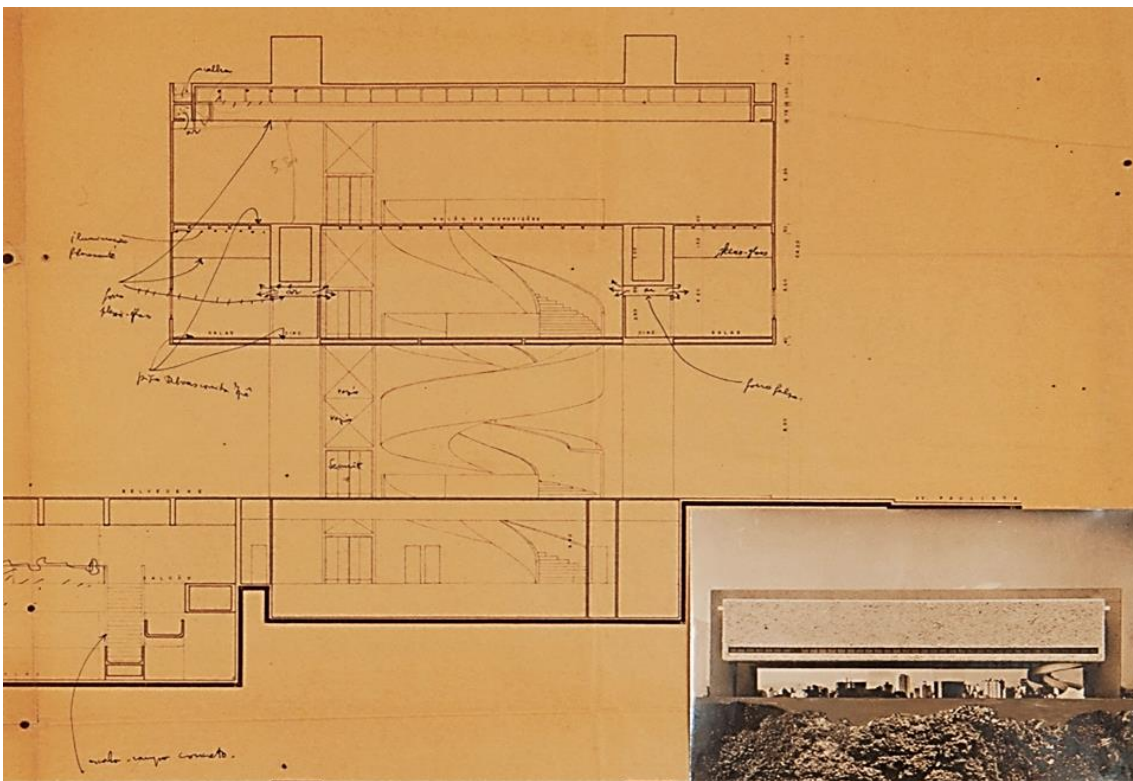
From the sketches it is possible to confirm how difficult was the transition from the initial drawings, with free techniques, to scale drawings, with ortogonal projection techniques. Section and plan overlapped designed enable the control of curves according to the steps dimensions, resulting in a volume whose shapes are wider and flattened. Lightness and organicity of the original intention are diluted, almost disappearing from the latest drawings prior to the abandonment of this version.

Lina radicalism exhibits itself in the tension between design and realization, between idealization and construction, between abstraction and reality. As other architects brought together in this issue of V!RUS, the work of Lina Bo Bardi has unresolved challenges, falling to us to think which of her questions which are still strong for our present.

All images were kindly provided by Instituto Lina Bo Bardi



Título: Detalhe Corte, Colagens de fotografia da maquete do museu com escada flor | Técnica/suporte: Hidrográfica, heliográfica, grafite, lápis de cor, colagem de fotografia, sobre papel offset | Dimensões: 30,0 x 25,0 cm

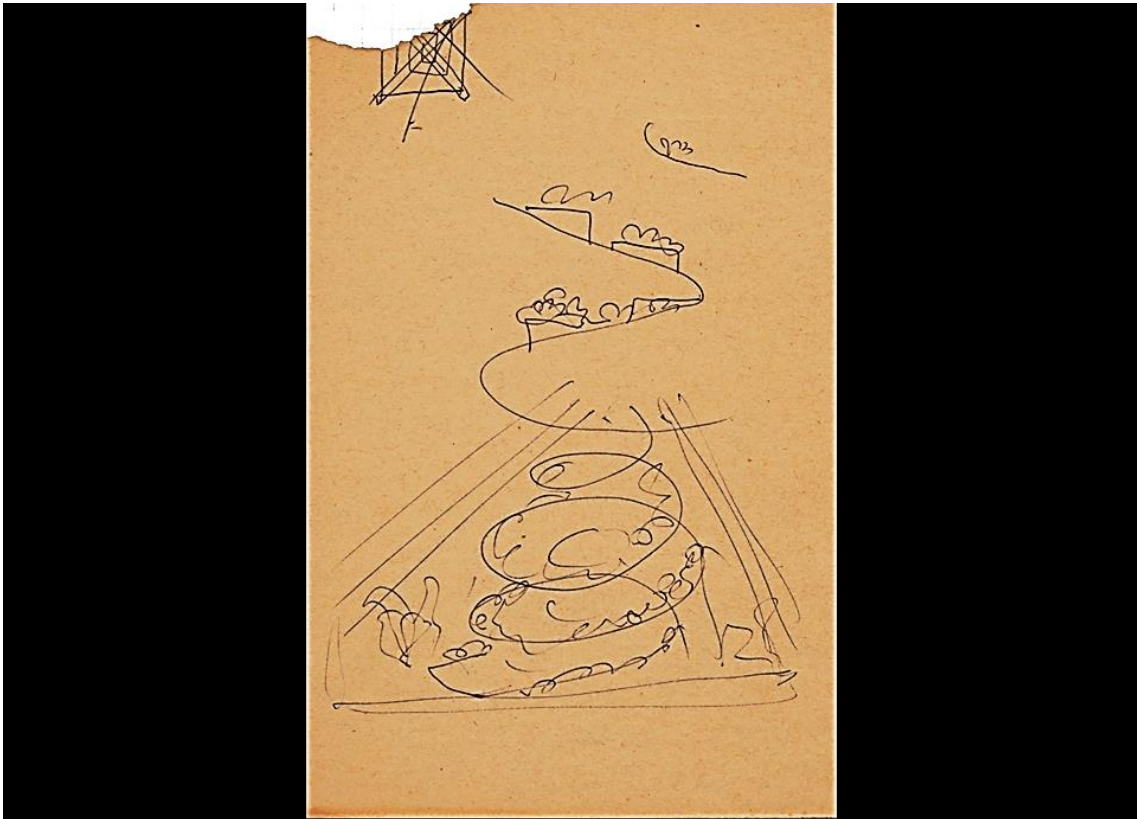


Título: Detalhe Corte, Colagens de fotografia da maquete do museu com escada flor | Técnica/suporte: Hidrográfica, heliográfica, grafite, lápis de cor, colagem de fotografia, sobre papel offset | Dimensões: 30,0 x 25,0 cm

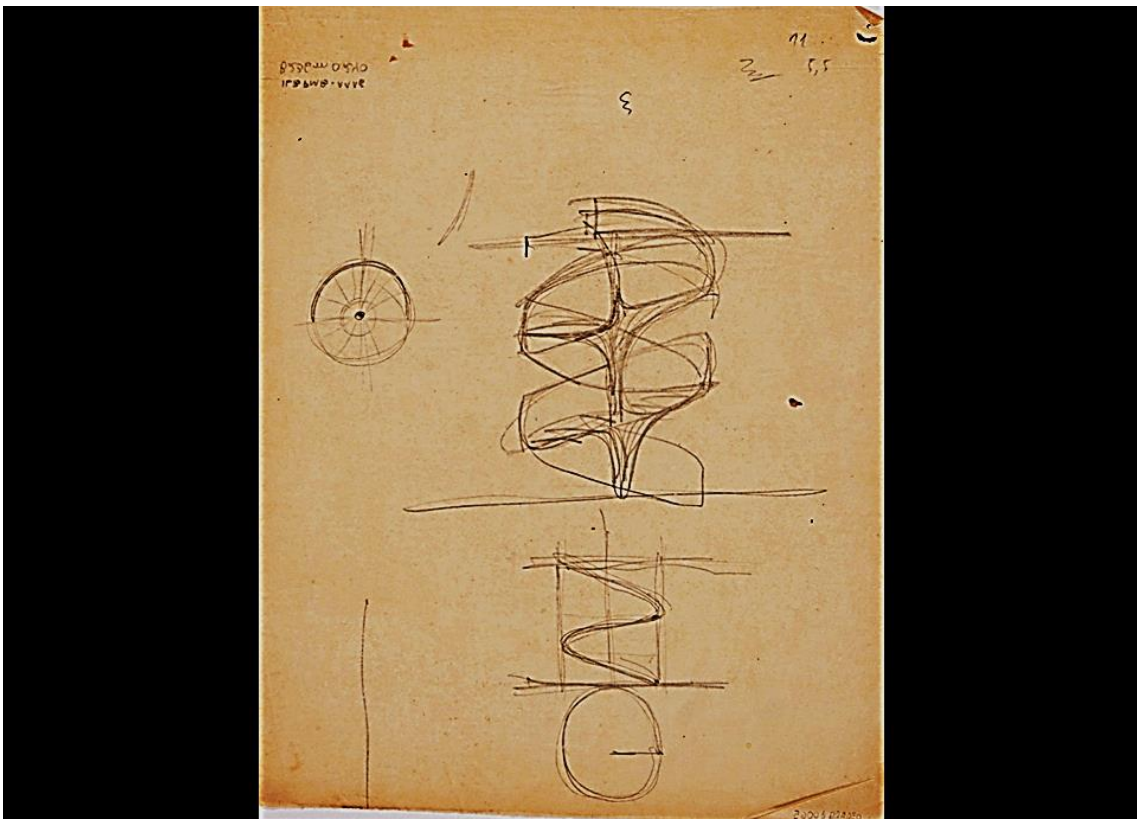
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Título: Desenho livre | Técnica/suporte: Esferográfica, sobre papel artesanal | Dimensões: 30,0 x 22,0 cm



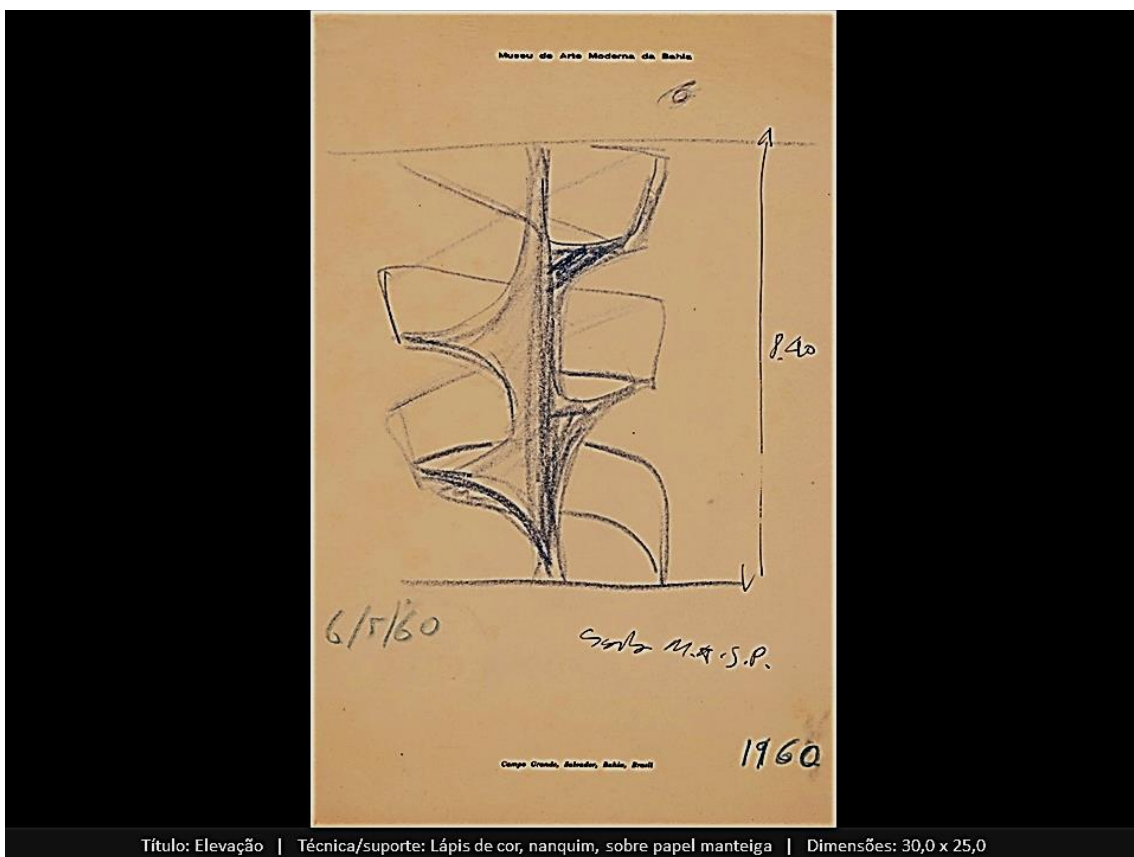
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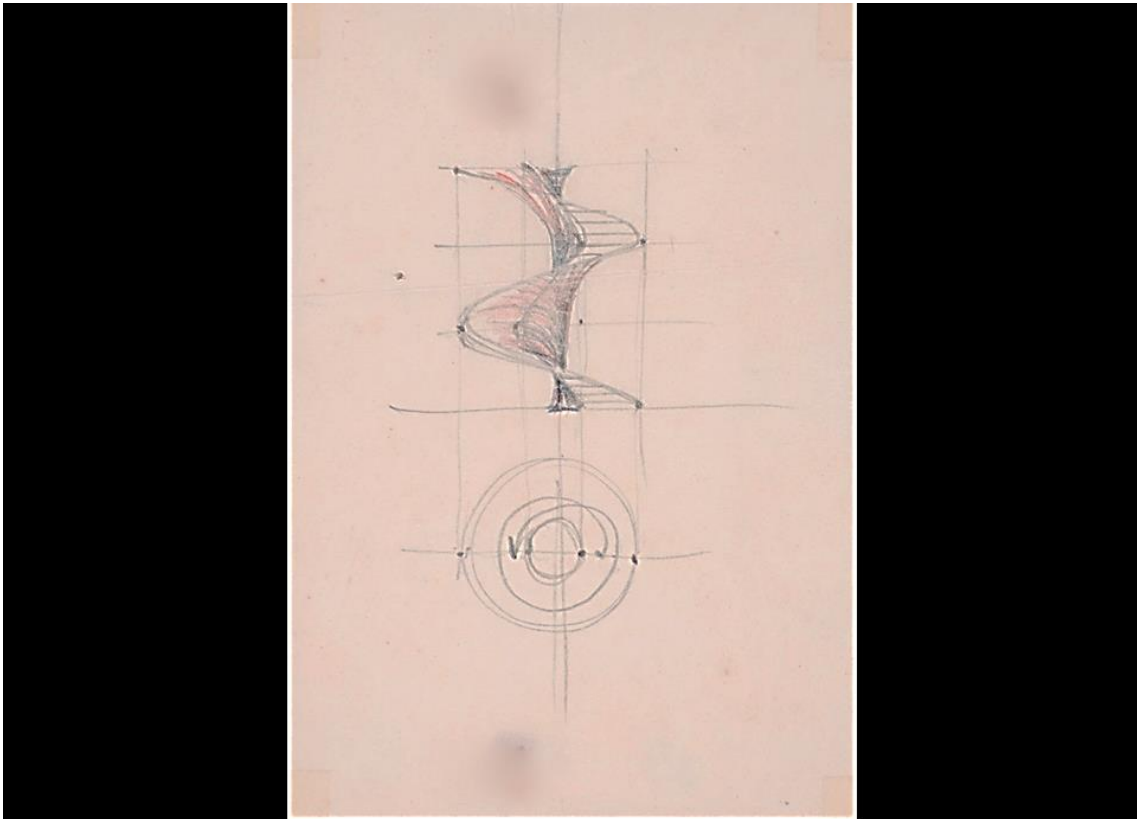
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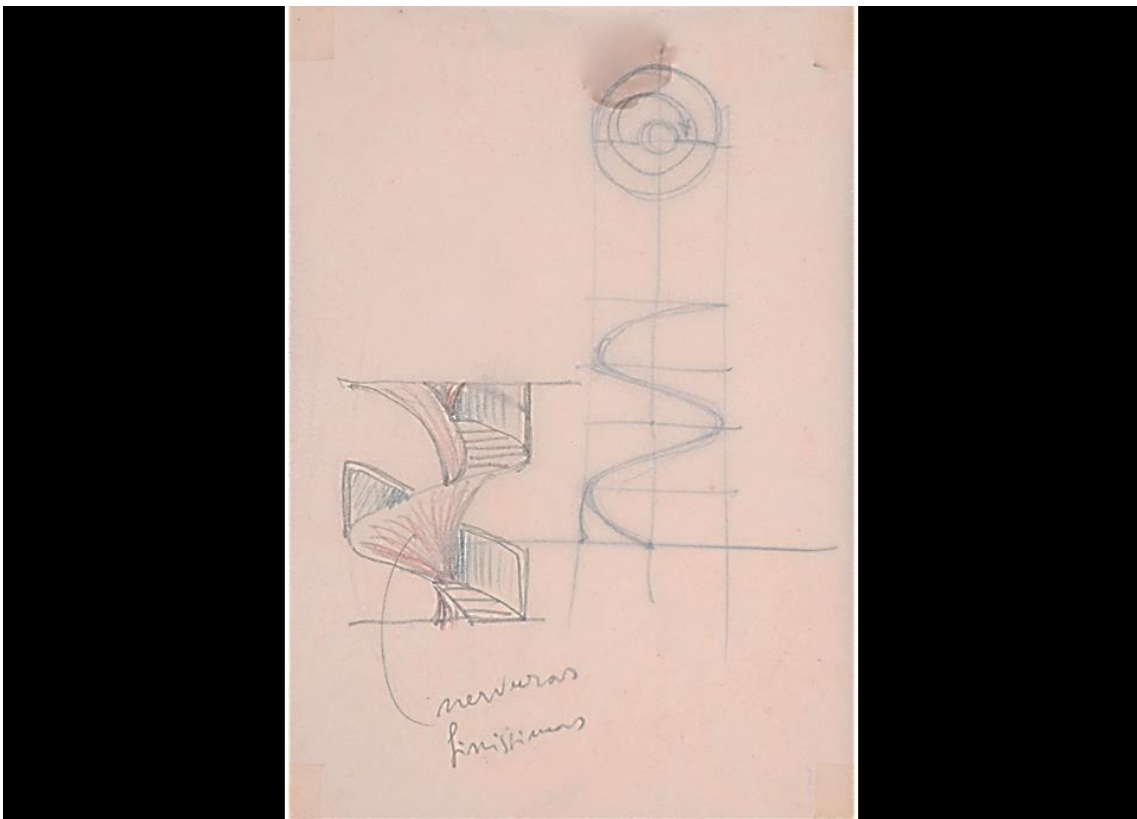
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Título: Elevação/ Planta | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, lápis de cor, sobre papel manteiga | Dimensões: 24,0 x 13,0

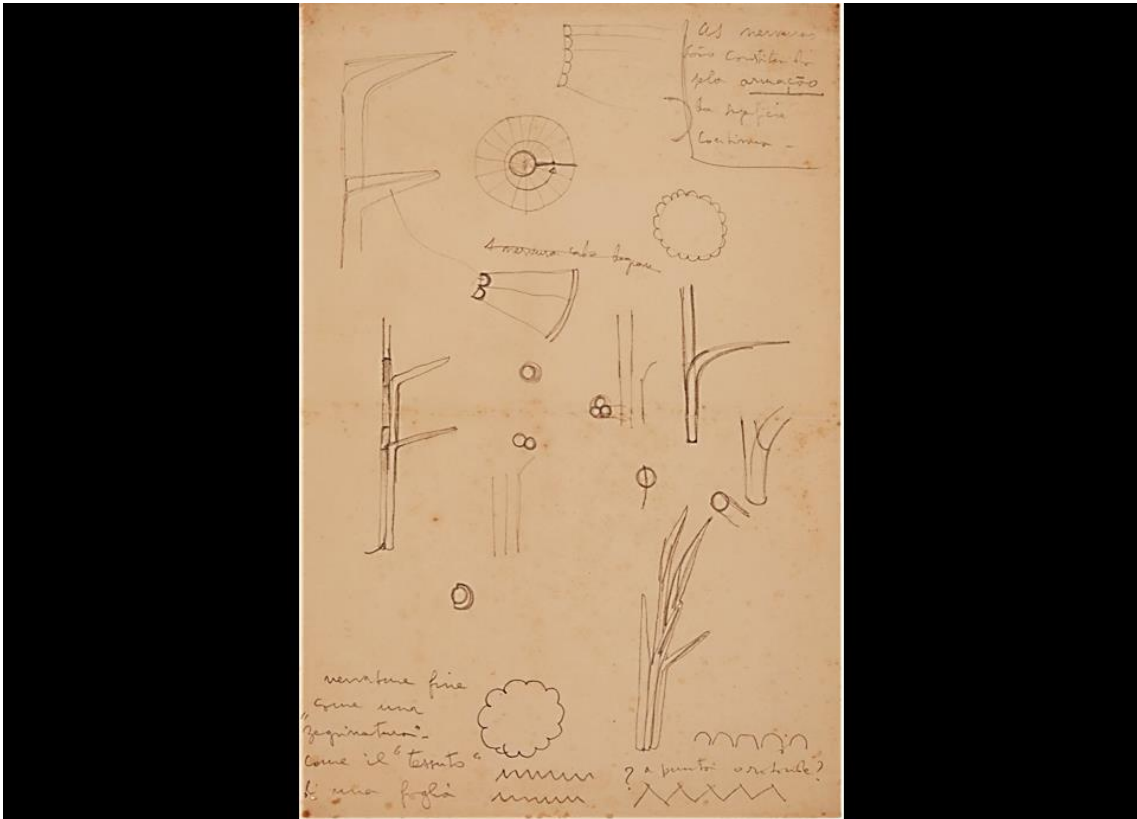


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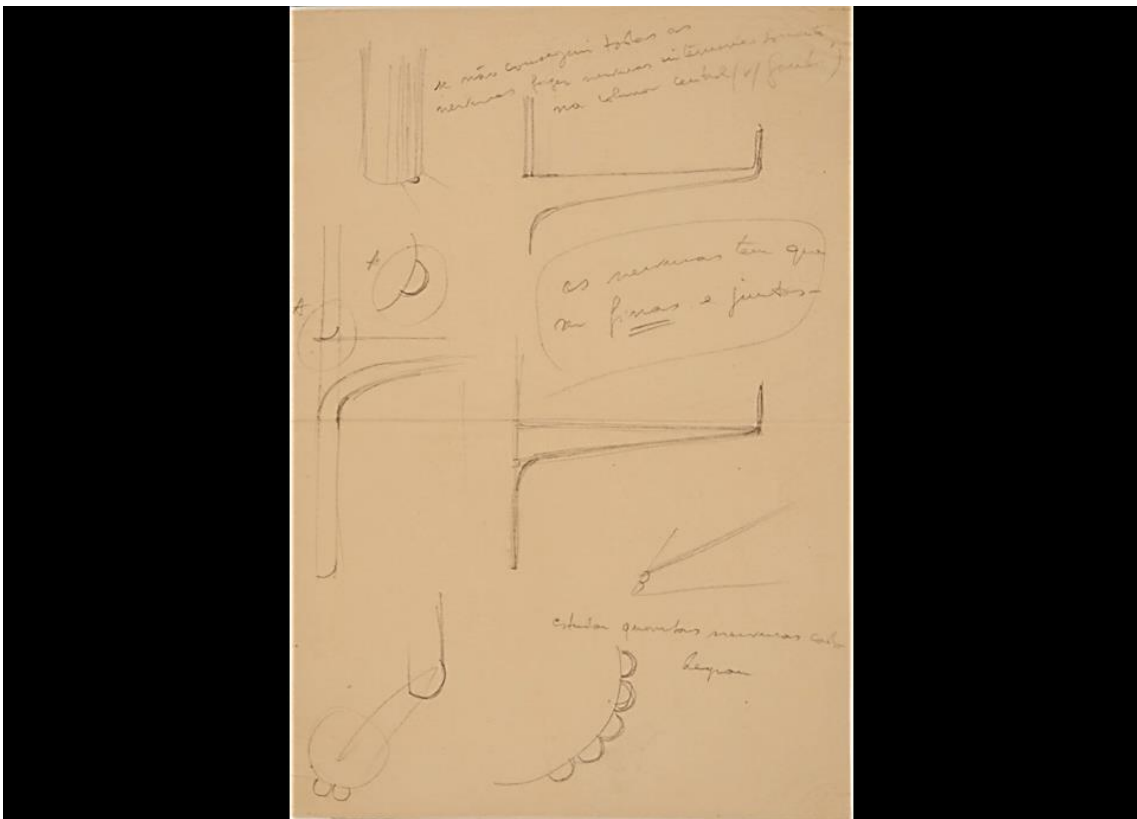
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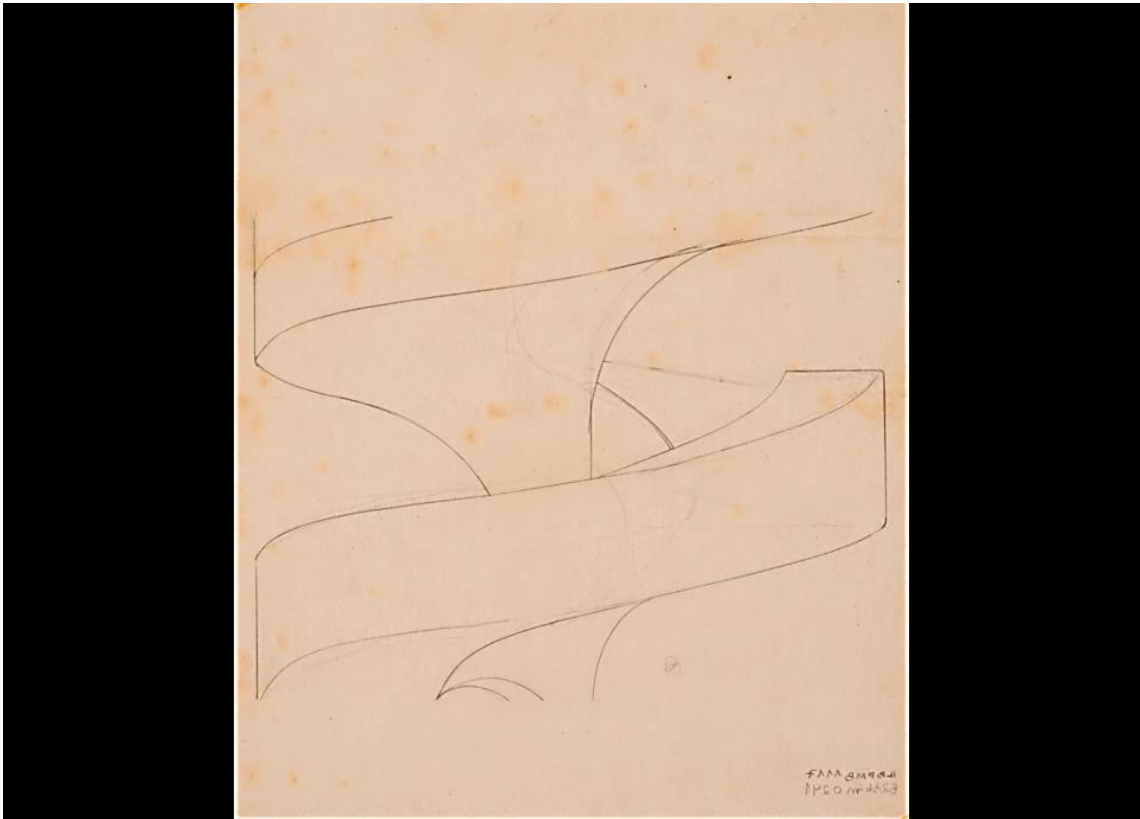
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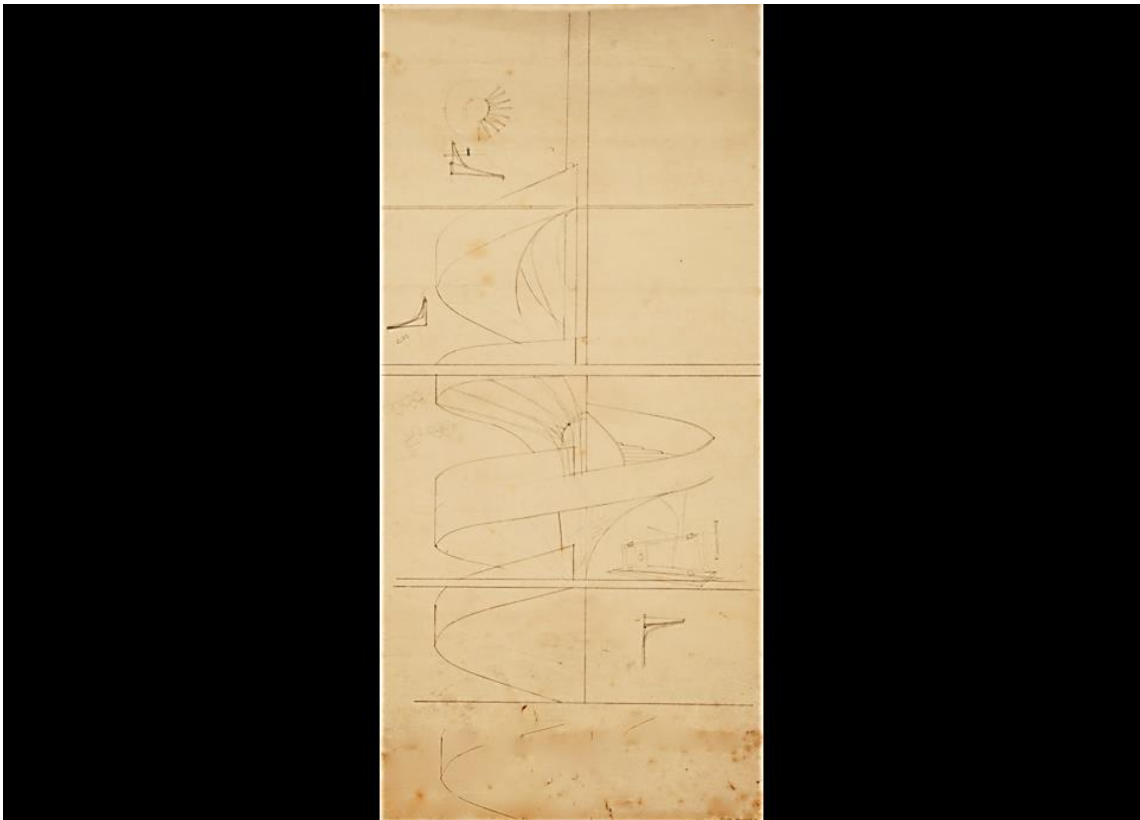
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Título: Detalhes/ Anotações | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, sobre papel manteiga | Dimensões: 34,0 x 25,0 cm



Título: Detalhes | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, sobre papel vegetal | Dimensões: 32,0 x 24,0 cm



Título: Elevação | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, sobre papel vegetal | Dimensões: 63,0 x 30,0 cm



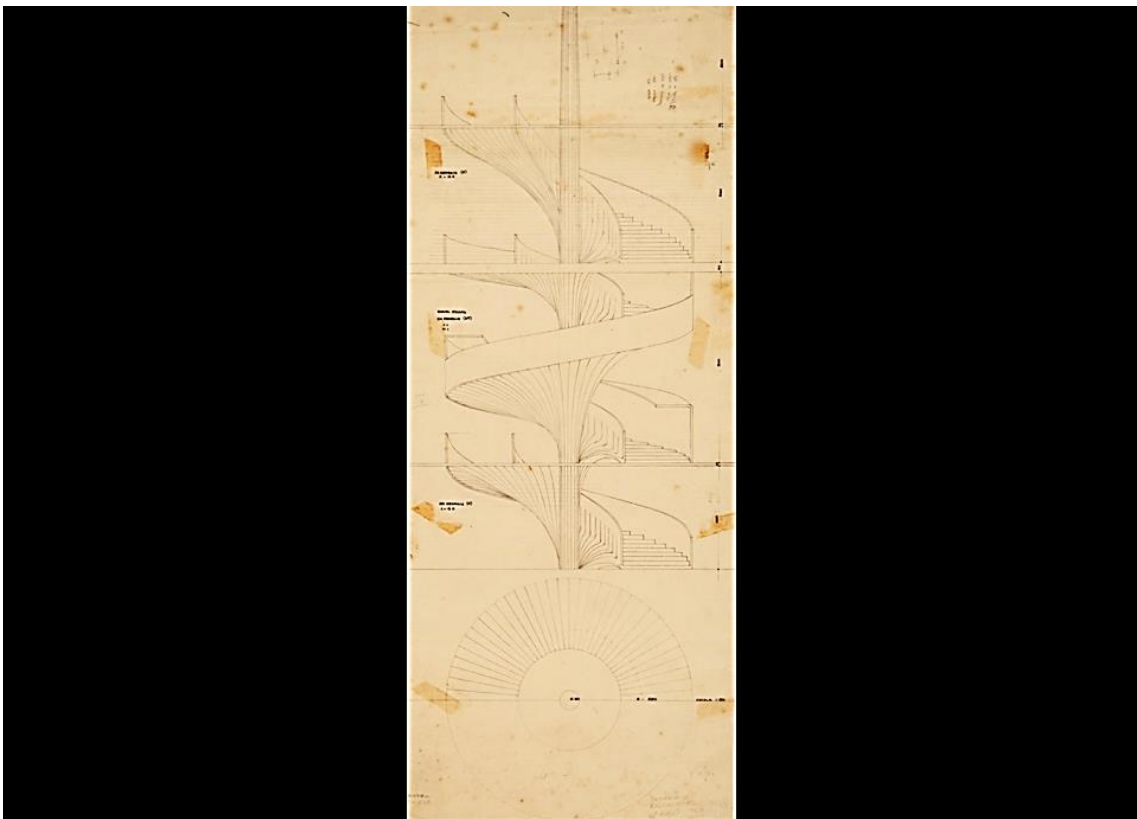
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Título: Elevação/ Planta | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, nanquim, sobre papel vegetal | Dimensões: 76,0 x 30,0 cm

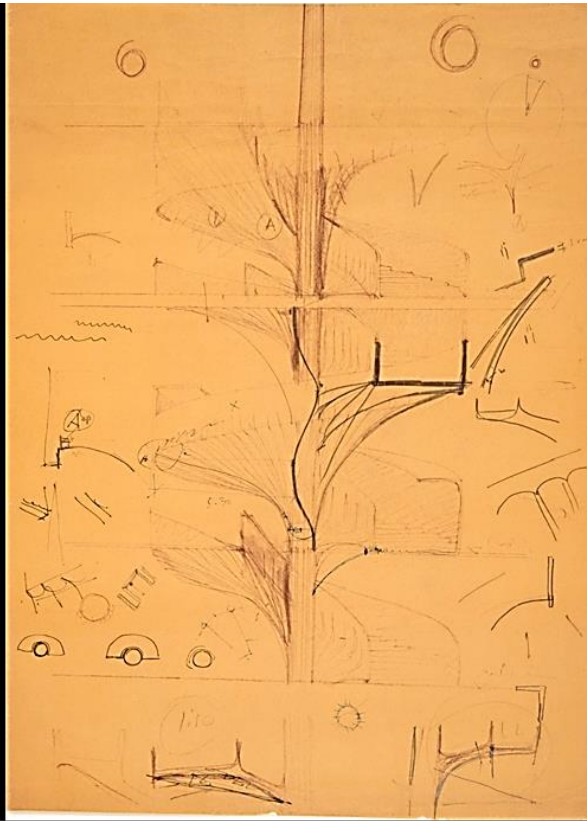


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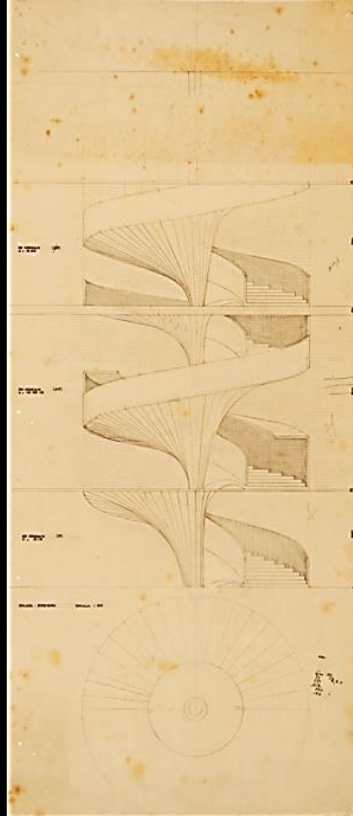
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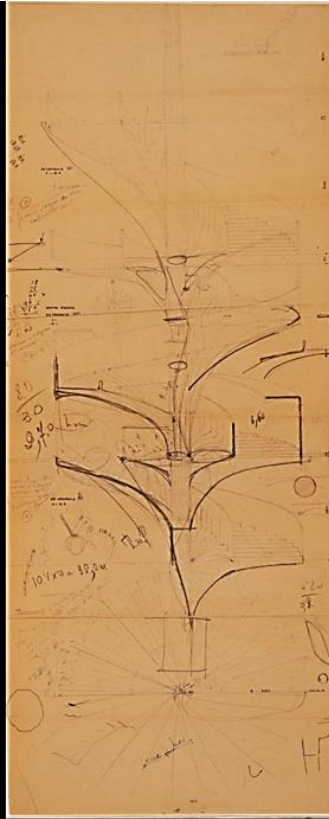


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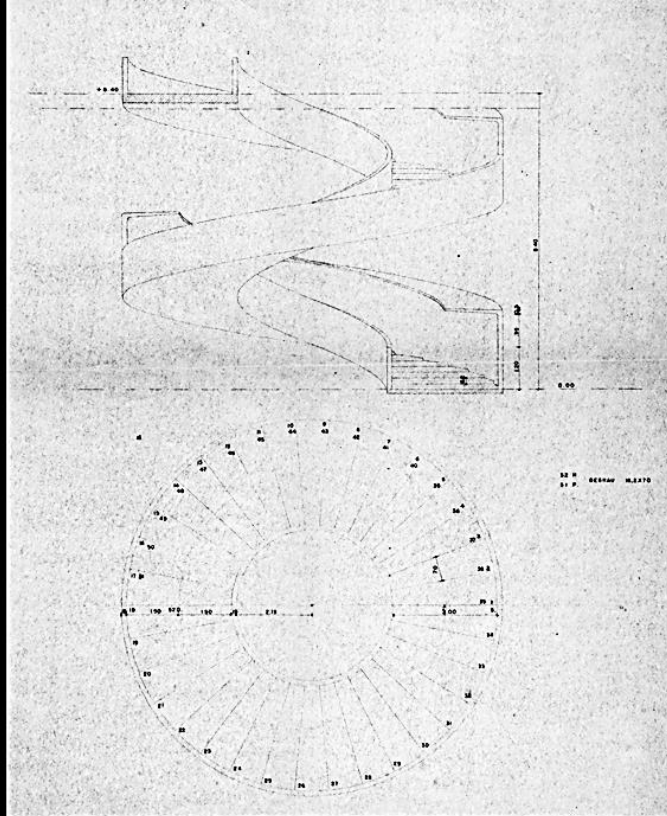
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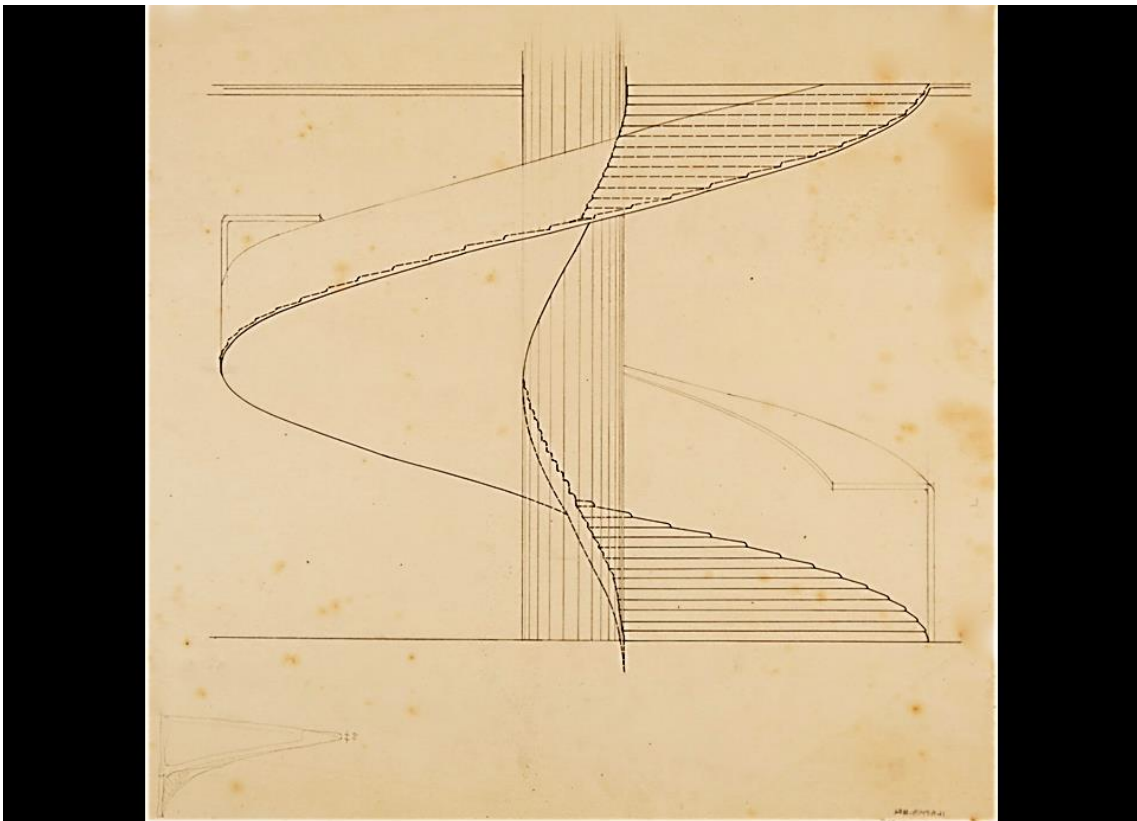
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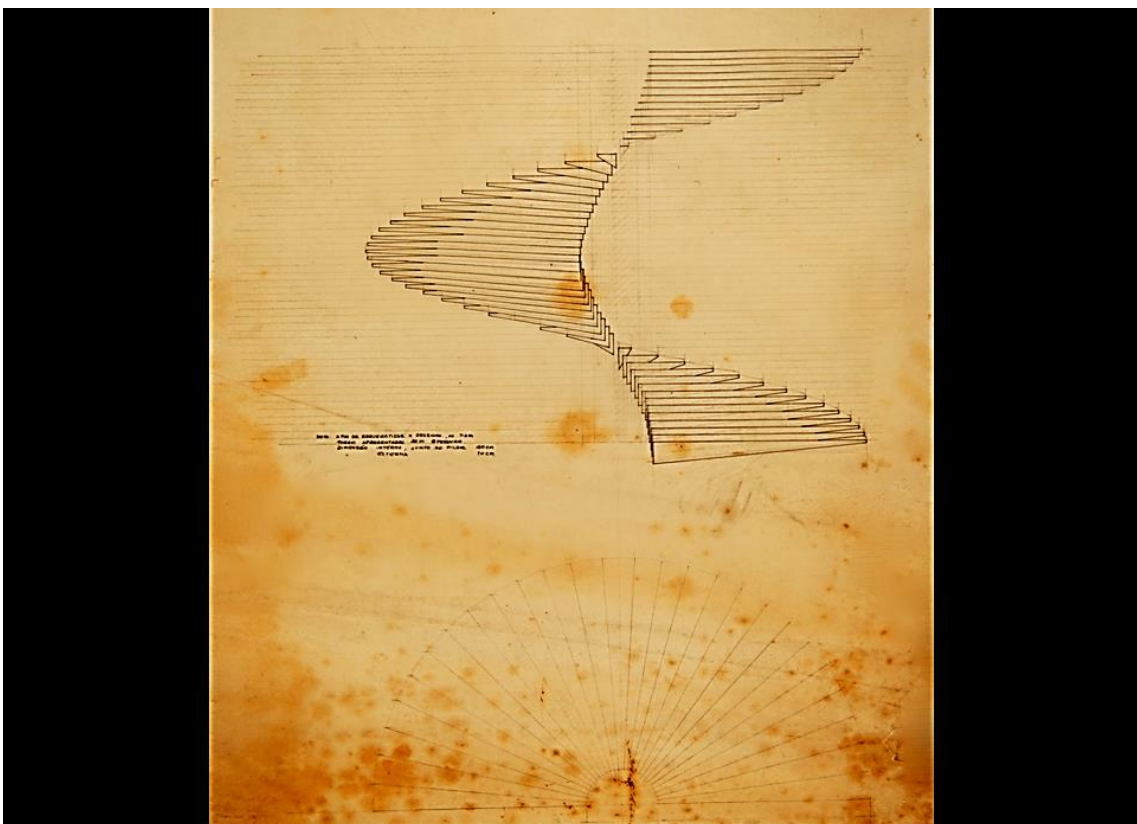
Título: Elevação | Técnica/suporte: Hidrográfica, heliográfica, grafite, nanquim, sobre papel offset | Dimensões: 71,0 x 33,0 cm



Título: Elevação parcial/ Planta | Técnica/suporte: Heliográfica, sobre papel offset | Dimensões: 57,0 x 49,0 cm



Título: Elevação parcial | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, nanquim, sobre papel manteiga | Dimensões: 43,0 x 46,0 cm



Título: Elevação parcial/ Planta parcial (semicírculo) | Técnica/suporte: Grafite, nanquim, sobre papel vegetal | Dimensões: 67,0 x 57,0