

La Ursa and its memories: cultural manifestation and affection in Pernambuco

La Ursa e suas memórias: manifestação cultural e afetividade em Pernambuco

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ABSTRACT

Carnival is a major festivity that takes place in February in Brazil, bringing together various cultural expressions. La Ursa, or Carnival Bears, is a traditional game in the Northeast, brought by European immigrants. Its main character is the bear, accompanied by a hunter, also called a gringo or tamer. This tradition is part of Pernambuco's Carnival, and it is common to see children and teenagers dressed up, especially in peripheral neighborhoods, in the days leading up to the festivities. They go door to door asking for money and singing: "La Ursa wants money, those who don't give are *pirangueiros*" — *Pirangueiro*, a term from Pernambuco's vocabulary, meaning "a frugal or stingy person, among other things." Beyond the games, parades and contests take place in several cities in Pernambuco, rewarding the best Carnival Bear costume. In the face of social changes, recognizing this tradition is essential, as it keeps Pernambuco's cultural identity alive. Preserving these manifestations allows new generations to understand their value, strengthening their sense of belonging. This article aims to identify how the emotional memories of La Ursa festivities and their applications in design highlight this cultural expression in Pernambuco.

Keywords: La Ursa. Pernambuco. Affective memory. Design. Cultural identity.

RESUMO

O Carnaval é uma grande festividade que acontece em fevereiro, no Brasil, reunindo diversas manifestações culturais. A La Ursa, ou Ursos do Carnaval, é uma brincadeira tradicional do Nordeste, trazida por imigrantes europeus. Seu personagem principal é o urso, acompanhado por um caçador, também chamado de gringo ou domador. Essa tradição faz parte do Carnaval pernambucano, e é comum ver crianças e adolescentes fantasiados, especialmente em bairros periféricos, nos dias que antecedem a folia. Eles vão de porta em porta pedindo dinheiro e cantando: "A La Ursa quer dinheiro, quem não dá é *pirangueiro*". *Pirangueiro*: vocábulo pernambuquês que significa "pessoa econômica, mão de vaca etc.". Além das brincadeiras, desfiles e concursos acontecem em várias cidades de Pernambuco, premiando a melhor fantasia do Urso de Carnaval. Diante das mudanças sociais, reconhecer essa tradição é essencial, pois ela mantém viva a identidade cultural pernambucana. A preservação dessas manifestações permite que novas gerações compreendam seu valor, fortalecendo o sentimento de pertencimento. Este artigo busca identificar como as memórias afetivas das festividades da La Ursa e suas aplicações no design evidenciam essa manifestação cultural em Pernambuco.

Palavras-chave: La Ursa. Pernambuco. Memória afetiva. Design. Identidade cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

Carnival is a major festivity characterized by abundance and universality (Araújo, 2003, p. 37). The author notes that this tradition dates back to ancient agrarian celebrations held in Egypt and the Near East, approximately 4,000 years before Christ (Araújo, 2003). These festivities, marked by rituals, dances, and costumes, honored fertility gods and expressed gratitude for life and requests for blessings for the future.

Carnival celebrations, beyond the festivities, served as an opportunity for total disorderly conduct. Amid the chaos and playfulness, criticisms were aimed at those in power and societal issues, exposing hypocrisies and inequalities.

In Brazil, until the mid-19th century, *entrudo* was the carnival practice that most closely resembled medieval festivities. Originating in the Iberian Peninsula and inspired by Greco-Roman Bacchic and Saturnalian ceremonies, *entrudo* developed during the early formalization of Christian Carnival, after 590 AD. "Its roots deepened in Portugal, lasting for about 10 to 12 centuries, with its peak between the 12th and 13th centuries" (Alencastro, 1997).

Currently, Carnival in Brazil is considered a major tourist attraction and one of the most representative celebrations of Brazilian identity. Since traditions are present in most states, each with its own particularities, analyzing the festival in Brazil reveals that it is most emphasized in the Southeast and Northeast regions of the country. Carnival is one of the main events that attract tourists to Brazil, consolidating its cultural and economic significance.

The festivities gained even more importance because they are public and free, as revelers dress up and occupy the city streets to celebrate. The streets were the main stage for the revelry, a festival that embodies simplicity and inclusiveness for all social classes:

In the history of Carnival, the street has always been an important stage for festivities; *entrudo*, *zé-pereira*, carnival clubs or societies, *cordões*, *ranches*, blocks, the parade, and samba schools have always used the streets as their stage. Those who did not participate would go to the streets to watch (Arantes, 2013, p. 10).

As mentioned earlier, the Southeast and Northeast are the regions with the strongest prominence of Carnival in Brazil, especially in Pernambuco, where emphasis is placed on street Carnival, with marches, electric trios, orchestras, and more. Besides the celebration itself, other festivities are present during the period leading up to or during the carnival, such as La Ursa, Frevo, and Maracatu.

La Ursa, or the Carnival Bear, is a tradition that most people outside the Northeast are unlikely to know. In this activity, children, teenagers, and even adults go out into the streets dancing and singing marchinhas, wearing handmade costumes, usually made from recyclable materials, crafted by a relative or even by the revelers themselves.

The origin of the La Ursa tradition has several versions, but it is speculated that this cultural manifestation was brought by European circus immigrants, specifically

Italians, who came to Recife between the late 19th century and the 1920s (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, 2017). Since then, this festivity, considered a Cultural Manifestation from Pernambuco, has been prominent over the years.

As an entertainment, this folk play can be seen as a way to promote temporary inclusion among different social classes in the appreciation and dissemination of Carnival customs and traditions of the local culture. The visibility of “La Ursa” can be explained both through the creation of meaning in its performances and choreographies, as well as in the construction of the aesthetic and musical artifacts that make up the festivities (Aranha, 2015, p. 122).

With the effort to recover and establish a sense of local identity, especially of the Carnival Bear, it is described as an objectified cultural memory, a tangible carrier of “mnemonic energy”, a Greek technique that uses simplification and association to help memorize more complex things, capable of storing knowledge through which a group would attain “a consciousness of its unity and singularity” (Assmann, 1995, p. 129–130). In other words, the importance of memory for the formation of subjectivity within the collective consciousness is linked to cultural identity and is present in many forms, in addition to playing a significant role in the sense of belonging and the construction of societal identities.

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

The present study aims to identify how the affective memories of the festivities and traditions of La Ursa, as well as their applications in design, highlight the presence of this cultural manifestation in the state of Pernambuco.

Specific Objectives

- To recover the history of this festival;
- To discuss affective memory and its relations with festivities in the state;
- To list examples of design that demonstrate the presence of this memory in Pernambuco.

JUSTIFICATION

The relevance of this work lies in the need to document and preserve a significant part of Pernambuco’s culture, which is at risk of being lost or altered over time. In a context of social changes, it is essential to recognize the value of La Ursa as a cultural manifestation, highlighting the importance of protecting and valuing these expressions. This not only contributes to the current state of research but also promotes the conservation of this rich cultural heritage for future analysis and appreciation.

Furthermore, in the social sphere, the tradition brought by La Ursa strengthens the community’s sense of identity and belonging, while also preserving and

transmitting cultural traditions to future generations. It also enriches the region's cultural landscape, providing a deeper understanding of the traditions associated with these festivities.

In light of this, it is evident that the absence of reflection on the festivities of La Ursa as part of Pernambuco's cultural expression could result in significant losses, both in terms of cultural identity and the socioeconomic impact on the communities involved in these celebrations, since these elements (the Bears themselves) have also come to be present in crafts and popular art.

An example of La Ursa's contribution to the community is its ability to encourage social integration in peripheral neighborhoods. Children and teenagers, by dressing up and going out into the streets singing marches and asking for contributions, are not only experiencing a cultural tradition but also able to establish community bonds, which can strengthen the sense of collective belonging. In the same vein, many of the costumes and accessories are handmade by family members, which can stimulate creativity and promote recycling of materials, valuing local craftsmanship, while also keeping the region's cultural identity alive.

Overall, this work not only documented the presence of La Ursa memories in Pernambuco but also clarified its ongoing impact on the state's cultural and social landscape. By exploring the connection between La Ursa traditions and contemporary design projects such as prints, masks, illustrations, souvenirs, clothing, and more, this research highlighted the significance of these festivities for Pernambuco's cultural identity.

In addition to preserving the memory of La Ursa, this study demonstrated how its vibrant colors, playful shapes, and symbolism have been revitalized by designers in contemporary creations. This presence can be observed in various artifacts, where these reinterpretations not only keep the tradition alive but also enable it to dialogue with new languages and audiences.

This study not only contributed to the appreciation of Pernambuco's cultural manifestation but also inspires new creative approaches that can revitalize traditional elements for contemporary use, thereby enriching the region's cultural landscape and strengthening its unique identity.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted in this study is classified as theoretical in nature, as it seeks to understand and interpret concepts, theories, and phenomena related to the La Ursa festivities in Pernambuco. Regarding its objective, the research is exploratory, involving a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, that is, an inseparable connection between the objective world and the subject's subjectivity. It cannot be translated into numbers, as it aims to investigate and explore the affective memories associated with La Ursa and its presence in the state, without the intention of establishing definitive conclusions or generalizations (Gil, 2002).

In the course of this work, a review of relevant information and documents about La Ursa was also conducted through the website of Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (FUNDAJ), a renowned institution in the field of culture and heritage, with particular focus on the Northeast region of Brazil. Consulting this source proved to be extremely important for enriching the research, providing data and materials that significantly contributed to the understanding of Carnival traditions, especially those related to La Ursa, within the Pernambuco context.

In terms of addressing the problem, the research adopted a qualitative perspective, which focused on a deep understanding and interpretation of the collected data through document analysis (Silva; Menezes, 2000, p. 20). This approach enabled a detailed investigation of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the La Ursa festivities, emphasizing subjective and qualitative aspects to capture the richness and complexity of the cultural memories involved.

Methodological procedures

This research, of a theoretical nature, may have applied applications based on its findings. It is classified as qualitative, as it sought results without the intention of statistical analysis. The methodological procedures adopted in this study followed a deductive approach, starting from general principles to arrive at specific conclusions about the presence of La Ursa's memory in Pernambuco. In this sense, a case study will be conducted based on the methodology (Silva; Menezes, 2000), with the festivities of La Ursa as the specific object of investigation. The central themes of the research focused on understanding the affective memories associated with La Ursa, exploring its origins, evolution, and cultural meanings within the Pernambuco context (Gil, 2002, p. 57).

The spatial delimitation of the research was restricted to the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, where the La Ursa festivities are a deeply rooted tradition in the local culture. Regarding the temporal delimitation, the study focused on the contemporary period, considering current practices and perceptions related to La Ursa. There was no specific population restriction for this research, as its focus was on the cultural festivities themselves, without limitations concerning participants.

The technical procedures included a bibliographic survey, through which theoretical information and examples of the presence of this manifestation in contemporary times were collected to support the theoretical analysis. Due to the physical distance between the cities in the state where this manifestation is present, data collection was conducted through secondary photographic records produced and published by newspapers and social media, capturing locations within the state where these manifestations are found, as well as through online data gathering with visual records of these manifestations. A visual reference to the popular culture of La Ursa was accepted as an inclusion criterion, while the exclusion criterion was the fact that the manifestation was not from the state of Pernambuco. Consequently, case studies were conducted to examine specific examples that demonstrate the presence of La Ursa memories in Pernambuco (Gil, 2002, p. 55).

CARNIVAL BEAR

The performance is characterized by a main figure, which is a single bear, and another participant, the tamer, who can be called the Commander or Italian. Additionally, in other versions of the festivities, a third figure appears, the Hunter (Figure 1), who uses a shotgun and “shoots” whenever the bear attempts to escape.



Source: Alexandre Berzin (1945).
Figure 1. The bear and the hunter.

In organized festivities, there may be a flag bearer, holding a banner or poster displaying the group's name and the founding date. There might also be someone responsible for collecting donations from the crowd that witnesses the event, a role that can also be performed by the Tamer, in addition to the management team and a balancer or juggler to make the bear dance.

However, the central figures are always the bear and the tamer. The bear's costume is the most elaborate, often a worn-out jumpsuit filled with plush, burlap, or other plant-based materials that are abundant in each region, such as agave or caroá. In its hands, the bear wears gloves with large claws at the fingertips, usually made of wire, and on its head, the most important and characteristic element: a mask made of papier-mâché, painted in various colors, including black, white, blue, red, and yellow.

The tamer's costume is simpler and also varies from region to region, but generally, it consists of a hat or bag used to collect money, along with a more elegant

outfit that was originally a suit. The tamer always wears a false mustache, either blonde or black, as well as a whip to discipline the bear.

Katarina Real, an important researcher who, during her stay in Brazil, conducted folkloric studies on Carnival and other cultural manifestations of Recife, states that in the first appearance of the Cabeça Lesa Bear in 1965, the costume was extremely rich and detailed:

In one of the "luxurious" Bears", the *Cabeça Lesa*, which appeared for the first time in the 1965 Carnival, the tamer wore a richly embroidered jacket and a tricorne, a style of hat that was popular from the 16th to the 18th century, with tall plumage, resembling a prince at a Frevo club (Real, 1967, p. 123).

Additionally, there is a peculiar orchestra, similar to a *charanga*, a band typically composed of wind instruments, accordion, triangle, bass drum, reco-reco, tambourine, and tambourins in the more basic groups. In simpler performances, it is common to hear the song "La Ursa wants money, those who don't give are *pirangueiros*," which originated as a way to warn revelers about the tradition of gifting La Ursa.

The term "*pirangueiro*," used for those who refuse to give money, carries a playful and pejorative tone, suggesting that the person is stingy or greedy. However, in more sophisticated orchestras, it was also possible to find instruments such as *cavaquinho*, guitars, snare drum, tambourine, and even clarinet and trombone. The author Katarina Real discusses her research on the rhythms present in La Ursa manifestations and the association of Italians with the accordion, an instrument developed in Austria but refined to its current model in Italy:

Any of these instruments may be missing, but not the accordion, according to my research among half a dozen of these groups. This is logical, considering the association between Italians and the accordion. The rhythm is always very fast and lively, typically xote, xaxado, baião, and even polka (Real, 1967, p. 124).

HISTORICAL RECOVERY

As mentioned earlier, there are many stories and tales about the origin of La Ursa. One of the versions is by Katarina Real, who states that the closest ancestor of the Pernambuco Bear comes from the Middle Ages. According to Real, at that time, bears were always present at fairs and festivals in European villages and towns, serving as entertainment provided by minstrels and jongleurs, synonymous terms used to refer to people considered artists, originally in medieval Europe (Figure 2). These performers were responsible for street spectacles that used animals as attractions, including bears, horses, monkeys, camels, and even lions.

Another version about the origin, which is of little credibility but still exists and is mentioned by Real, is the story about the son of Brazil's second president, Floriano Peixoto, who had the same name as his father and was a Greco-Roman wrestler. This story began after rumors that he had fought with the so-called bear.



Source: Reynold (1931, p. 166).

Figure 2. Illustration of a performative bear in the Middle Ages.

However, some versions suggest that La Ursa may have its origins among the European Gypsies, who traveled through cities with chained animals, dancing in exchange for coins, similar to the version presented by Ovídio da Cunha (FUNDAJ, 2023).

It is worth mentioning that Ovídio da Cunha (1948), in "*Ursos e maracatus*", published in *Contraponto* magazine, discussed La Ursa as an inheritance from Europe, possibly also brought by Italians, within an Afro-Indigenous Carnival.

Probably during the colonial period, the sugar mills had as artisans Italians, who were always skilled in copper metallurgy. From this small population of artisans, the "bears" would have emerged, societies affiliated with the "Carnival Federation", which appear leading a chained bear by the snout, guided by men with long mustaches. In these bears, there is always a group of young women with tambourines, with string instruments always predominating (Cunha, 1948).

Katarina Real recounts that, in the past, the bears were identified as associations by the Pernambuco Carnival Federation (FCPE) and also by public security agencies, making it difficult to distinguish which groups were genuine (Real, 1967, p. 128). However, in 1965, the FCPE established special categories of Bears: *Aliado*, founded in 1959 (Figure 3); *Branco Folião*, founded in 1960; *Cabeça Lesa*, founded in 1965 (Figure 4); *Come Rama*, founded in 1964; and *Mimoso da Mustardinha*, founded in 1965, among others.



Source: FUNDAJ (1961).
Figure 3. *Urso Aliado* in front of its headquarters.



Source: FUNDAJ (1965).
Figure 4. *Urso Cabeça Lesa* leaving its headquarters, in the Prazeres neighborhood.

MEMORY, AFFECTIVITY AND CULTURE

Graphic and affective memory

Memory, a central theme in understanding individual and collective identity, is multifaceted and complex. Several authors have dedicated themselves to uncovering its mechanisms and nuances, among them Maurice Halbwachs (1990), who proposed a categorization that has become a fundamental reference for the study of memory: individual memory, social memory, and collective memory.

Individual memory resides in each person's experiences and life events, shaped by their personal interactions, interpersonal relationships, and sociocultural context. These memories, unique and non-transferable, form each individual's life story, influencing their perception of the world and their actions (Halbwachs, 1990). For example, the memory of a reveler dressed as La Ursa during Carnival, along with their sensations, emotions, and experiences during the celebration, constitutes their individual memory of La Ursa.

Social memory, in turn, arises from the intersection of individual memory and collective memory. It is shaped through the negotiation of meanings and communication among members of a group, influencing individuals' perceptions of the past and present. Through processes of symbolic mediation, social memory is constantly reinterpreted and re-signified, shaping collective identity and social cohesion (Halbwachs, 1990). The social memory of La Ursa can be built based on the interaction of individual memories of revelers, stories told about the tradition, representations in the media and popular culture, among other elements.

According to the author, collective memory represents the set of shared memories among a group or community, rooted in their history and identity. This memory is constructed and transmitted through traditions, rituals, narratives, and symbols, strengthening the sense of belonging and social cohesion. For example, La Ursa, as a symbolic figure of Pernambuco's Carnival, embodies the collective memory of this tradition, bringing together the community's shared memories of the festival, its characters, and its meanings.

The graphic representations of La Ursa, such as costumes, artworks, and others, serve as artifacts of memory. Through forms, colors, and textures, these objects are capable of evoking feelings, stories, and experiences, weaving the past into the present (Damazio, 2006). Each image is able to carry the experiences and perspectives of its creator, contributing to the construction of collective memory and strengthening the bond between different generations of the carnival community.

Affective memory, a concept extensively discussed by authors like Candau (2016), refers to memories strongly marked by emotions and sensations. It is directly related to how sensory experiences, such as sounds, smells, images, and movements, can connect to personal experiences, giving them a lasting and symbolic meaning. In the context of Carnival, affective memory can serve as a powerful link between the individual and the tradition, for example, when hearing the drums or seeing a

La Ursa costume, many revelers are emotionally transported to past experiences, reinforcing their cultural belonging. By keeping alive the emotions linked to these experiences, this sensitive dimension of memory fosters both the preservation of traditions and their renewal in the collective imagination.

Material culture

Material culture, composed of objects, goods, and tangible artifacts, transcends mere utility and stands as a powerful vantage point for understanding the functioning and transformations of societies over time (Meneses, 1994). Each artifact, from rudimentary tools to elaborate works of art, carries within it a fragment of history, whispering secrets about beliefs, values, social practices, and challenges faced by civilizations in different eras.

Therefore, material culture is established as a crucial tool for understanding societies, complementing other sources of historical knowledge and revealing the transformations that civilizations have undergone over time.

Affective memory

In the context of La Ursa traditions, it is possible to relate the visual and symbolic elements of this manifestation to what Norman (2008) defines as the reflective level of design. This level is directly connected to subjectivity and affective memory, being influenced by cultural and emotional aspects. The costumes, masks, and representations of La Ursa, when experienced over the years by different people, carry unique and personal meanings, evoking memories of past experiences such as processions, sounds, smells, and social interactions. These objects thus become artifacts of memory, because, as Norman (2008, p. 66) states, "what truly matters is the story of the interaction". In other words, the value of these elements lies both in how they were used and in how they left marks on the experiences and emotions of those who participated in the tradition.

LA URSA IN PERNAMBUCO

Over the decades, La Ursa has become not only a symbol of Carnival festivities but also an intrinsic part of the cultural identity of various cities in Pernambuco. From lively celebrations to its presence in architectural elements, designs, crafts, and local artistic productions, La Ursa continues to leave its mark on multiple facets of everyday life in Pernambuco.

Through a mapping conducted on websites such as G1 and Folha de Pernambuco, it was possible to uncover the prominent presence of La Ursa in cities like Recife, Olinda, Caruaru, Arcoverde, São Caetano, São Lourenço da Mata, Ribeirão, and Limoeiro. In these locations, it manifests in various aspects, from streets alive with the sounds and colors of Carnival to sculptures and bars that pay tribute to it.

This analysis (Figure 5) reveals La Ursa not only as a folkloric tradition but also as a cultural manifestation in constant transformation, adapting to new social and cultural realities and contributing to the construction of Pernambuco's identity.



Figure 5. Map of the cities that show the presence of La Ursa.

Recife

Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, is one of the cradles of La Ursa, with various representations spread throughout the city today. One example is La Ursa (Figure 6), a bar, café, and restaurant located in one of the city's oldest buildings, which, as the name suggests, carries a sense of cultural identity through the presence of elements of this Carnival symbol in the state.

Furthermore, the festivities of the traditional figure of Pernambuco's Carnival are undergoing modernization to meet the needs of contemporary times. An example is the lyrical block "O Bonde" (Figure 7), which, in addition to performing its classic role of soliciting contributions from participants and spectators, now also accepts payments via credit card, debit card, and Pix. This reflects the evolution of society and the need to keep up with new trends.

Olinda

In the Guadalupe neighborhood of Olinda, the tradition of making La Ursa masks remains alive through Julião (Figure 8), who learned the craft at age 12 from his father. This tradition was started by his grandfather. While the bear mask is the most famous within the Julião family, a wide variety of models are available. Using papier-mâché and arrowroot gum, the masks and "big heads" as Julião calls them, are meticulously handcrafted and painted with oil paint.

Caruaru

In "*Little Princess of Agreste*", it is the skilled artisan Shivo Araújo who keeps the tradition of La Ursa alive in Pernambuco through his sculptures. With mastery,



Source: La Ursa Recife (@laursarecife) (2023).
 Figura 6. La Ursa Bar.

he transforms important historical figures from Brazil into representations of La Ursa (Figure 9). For Shivo, these folkloric figures are not just Carnival symbols, but also represent a period of challenges and joys in his life.

São Caetano

For five decades, São Caetano has been the stage for the tradition of La Ursa, a practice deeply rooted in the local culture (Figure 10). Initially organized by traditional families, these folkloric characters appeared in small groups, singing and dancing to the sound of objects that produce various noises (G1, 2018). As mentioned earlier, La Ursa



Source: Folha de Pernambuco (2024).
Figure 7. Lyric Block "O Bonde" in the street.



Source: Rafael Furtado (2020).
Figure 8. Julião and his masks.



Source: Nascimento e Vaz (2022).
Figure 9. La Ursa Ariano Suassuna.

began soliciting monetary donations, which became a distinctive feature, symbolized by the popular song “La Ursa wants money, those who don’t give are *pirangueiros*”. From this tradition, the La Ursa contest in the municipality was created, aiming to further strengthen the carnival culture and preserve this rich cultural heritage.

São Lourenço da Mata

In the Recife Metropolitan Region, the city of São Lourenço da Mata highlights the festivities of La Ursa. About 20 groups, including bulls, bears, and associations, parade through the city. The main attraction is the White Bear of Cangaçá (Figure 11), declared a local cultural heritage. With 41 years of existence, the White Bear of Cangaçá is a two-time champion of La Ursa in Pernambuco.

Arcoverde

The vibrant figure of La Ursa (Figure 12) also makes its presence felt in Arcoverde, in the backcountry of Pernambuco, Araripe. This cultural manifestation, rich in symbolism and affectivity, finds a fertile space to flourish in this municipality, perpetuating traditions and creating affective memories that intertwine with the local identity.



Source: G1 (2018).
Figure 10. La Ursa contest.



Source: Folha de S.Paulo (2024).
Figure 11. Presentations of *Marrom Teimoso* and *Branco de Cangaça* Bears.

In 2012, the Project for the Maintenance of the Peleja Bear (Figure 13) was established by the Boi Maracatu Cultural Association, aiming to preserve the tradition of the Peleja Bear in Arcoverde. The project offers workshops and training courses in various fields, such as dance, music, theater, and mask and costume making, for young members of the community.



Source: Hugo Muniz (@hugomunizzz) (2022).
Figure 12. *Pé de Lã* Bear.

The initiative aims to strengthen the local popular culture, generate income and opportunities for young people, and preserve the identity of the *Peleja Bear*, a prominent figure in Arcoverde's Carnival. *La Ursa* remains alive through the community's struggle and hard work, which is dedicated to keeping the flame of this important cultural manifestation burning brightly.

This project is an example of the strength of tradition and the importance of popular culture for the Arcoverde community. Through the preservation and promotion of the *Peleja Bear*, the project contributes to the construction of local identity and the social development of the community.

Ribeirão

In the Mata Sul region of Pernambuco, the Carnival festivities take on a grandiose touch with the presence of the Giant *La Ursa* of Ribeirão (Figure 14). Standing at 3.5 meters tall, the imposing figure dominates the streets, enchanting revelers



Source: Cityhall of Arcoverde (2021).

Figure 13. Project for the Maintenance of the Peleja Bear.

of all ages. Created in 2016 by artisan Jorge, La Ursa is a result of a talent inherited from his mother, continuing a family tradition that brings joy to the community.

More than just a Carnival character, the Giant Bear has become a symbol of the local culture. Each year, the income collected from donations by revelers is reinvested in creating new costumes, ensuring that the Bear continues to evolve and surprise everyone.

Limoeiro

Limoeiro's Carnival in Pernambuco is a traditional celebration held every year in February. One of the highlights of this festivity is La Ursa, whose costumes are made from burlap, plush, velvet, and other materials, decorated with ribbons, flowers, and hats. Each bear has its own story and tradition, and revelers sing and dance to Carnival music as they pass by.



Source: G1 (2023).

Figure 14. Giant La Ursa.

In 2024, the bears *Peludinho* (Figure 15), *da Última Hora*, *Esperança*, *Drácula*, *Pé de Lã*, and *Atrás de Casa* parade in Limoeiro. Each of them performed a different show, with music, choreographies, and costumes that delighted the audience. Limoeiro's Carnival is a celebration for the whole family, and the bears are one of the most popular attractions that ensure the joy of revelers.



Source: E-news WEBTV (2024).

Figure 15. *Peludinho* Bear.

LA URSA IN DESIGN, ARTS AND HANDICRAFT

The graphic representations of La Ursa, such as costumes, masks, illustrations, and other visual creations, are able to transcend their aesthetic function and play a fundamental role in the construction and re-signification of collective memory.

In the social context in which they are embedded, these visual expressions become symbols that reinforce community bonds, revive affections, and preserve traditions. The handcrafted production of these artifacts, often done within families or groups, encourages intergenerational interaction and strengthens the sense of belonging to the local community.

As Damazio (2006) observes, objects can function as “artifacts of memory”, awakening feelings, memories, and experiences. Thus, when shared on social networks, craft fairs, and during Carnival, these representations update and expand the social memory of La Ursa, allowing individual memories of revelers to become part of a collective narrative. In this context, design not only materializes these affections but also becomes a tool for cultural preservation, connecting the past, present, and future.

The presence of La Ursa in graphic artifacts has the potential to become a fundamental tool for preserving memory, transmitting values, and building the cultural identity of the state. By incorporating images and symbols of La Ursa into everyday items and art, the tradition is constantly remembered and celebrated. Additionally, interactivity and engagement are promoted through these products, which enable people to interact tangibly with the culture, whether by wearing a shirt, drinking from a printed cup, or decorating their homes with themed items, as listed in Chart 1.

Chart 1. List of artifacts found.

| Graphic | Product/Fashion |
|--|----------------------|
| Flag | American-style glass |
| Woodcut <i>La Ursa Aranha</i> | Bottom |
| Digital collage | Cachepot |
| Tattoo | Refrigerator magnet |
| Album <i>Carnaval no Inferno</i> , from the Eddie band | Pillow |
| | T-shirt |
| | Shirt and pants |

Considering the representations of La Ursa as cultural heritage also involves understanding these elements within the framework of material culture. As Prown (1982) points out, artifacts carry not only the creativity of their makers but also the values, ideas, and beliefs of a society at a given time. In the case of La Ursa, masks, costumes, accessories, and even graphic representations function as symbolic records that go beyond aesthetics: they carry memories, stories, and shared feelings. These objects withstand the passage of time and help tell not only the history of the tradition itself but also the way it is experienced, perceived, and transmitted by different generations.

Graphic

In the book *Dez ensaios sobre memória gráfica*, Priscila Farias and Marcos da Costa Braga (2018) discuss the idea that graphic design plays a fundamental role as

a support for cultural memory by enabling the permanence and circulation of visual signs loaded with social, historical, and emotional meanings. In the case of the La Ursa tradition, these graphic manifestations materialize in posters, prints, illustrations, and various visual records, functioning as artifacts of memory capable of bringing to the present a sense of belonging and local identity. These representations not only visually document the manifestation but also contribute to its re-signification over time, connecting generations and strengthening the collective imaginary that encompasses Pernambuco's popular culture.

For the listing of these graphic artifacts (Figure 16), a search was conducted on websites and Instagram pages, identifying various examples that highlight the presence and importance of La Ursa in Pernambuco.



Source: adapted from the websites Apple Music (2024), Editora Bagaço (2024), Imaginário Brasileiro (2024b), Instagram @juba.ttt (2024), Instagram @projetociberdelia (2024) and lorguti (2024).

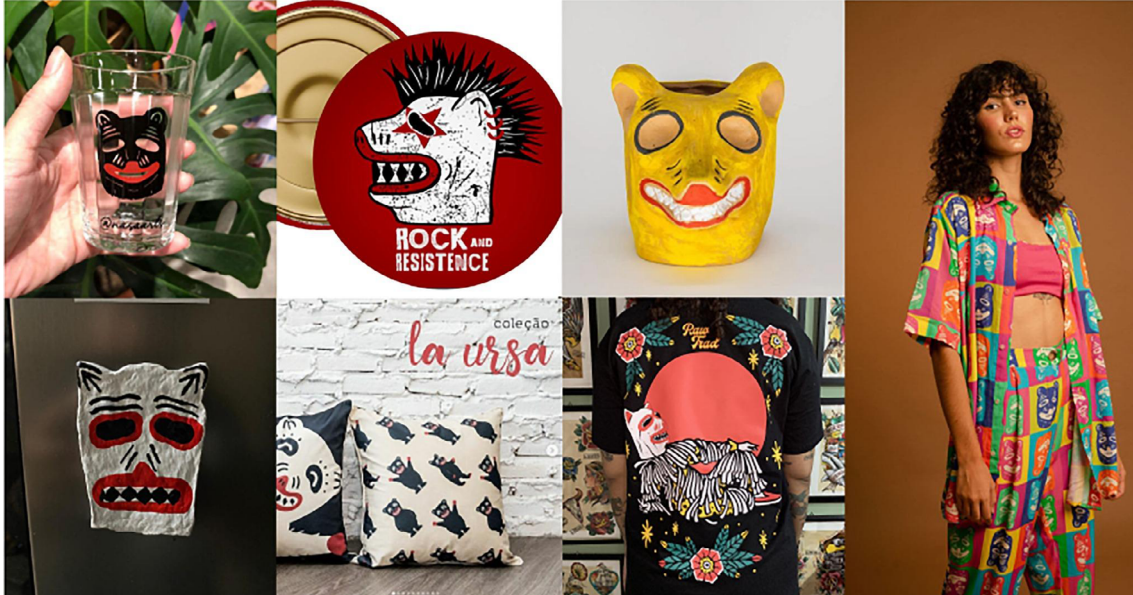
Figure 16. Assembly of graphic artifacts.

Through this research, it was possible to find artifacts that incorporate the image of La Ursa both physically and digitally, including flags with various prints, woodcuts, and album cover illustrations, such as "*Carnaval no Inferno*" by the Eddie Band, as well as children's books like "*La Ursa Cara Feia*" published by Bagaço Publishing.

There are also digital collages, which carry not only the image of La Ursa but also a strong sense of Pernambuco's identity. Additionally, it was possible to find the work of professional tattoo artists who have immortalized the image of La Ursa on their clients'skin.

Product/fashion

For the listing of these artifacts applied to products (Figure 17), a search was conducted on websites, Instagram pages, in-person visits, and craft fairs.



Source: adapted from the websites Golpe Store (2024), Imaginário Brasileiro (2024a), Instagram @ wunderbarbrasil (2024), Loja Henrique Brandão (2024), Na Laje (2024) and Oh! Laria (2024).

Figure 17. Assembly of product/fashion artifacts.

Graphic and product/fashion artifacts serve as educational tools that can spark curiosity and interest among people who may not be very familiar with La Ursa. Cultural continuity can also be ensured by integrating the tradition into new contexts, such as digital media and fashion. Younger generations can find relevance and connect with the tradition in ways that are familiar to them.

Finally, these items reinforce the cultural identity and local pride, fostering a sense of belonging and the historical continuity of the state. In this way, artifacts not only help preserve the memory of La Ursa but also ensure that this rich cultural tradition continues to be passed down from generation to generation, remaining alive and relevant in contemporary society.

CONCLUSIONS

This article investigated the origins and artifacts associated with the La Ursa festivities in Pernambuco, revealing the rich culture, beliefs, and values that define this tradition. Through a preliminary study, the research highlighted how La Ursa shapes both individual and collective identity, strengthening social bonds and transmitting values from generation to generation.

La Ursa presents itself as a stage where memories intertwine, creating an invaluable cultural legacy and offering a potential opportunity for investigation through affective memory. Through mapping the cities, it was possible to identify the mechanisms by which this tradition shapes identities and strengthens the sense of belonging and social cohesion. The festivity ensures the perpetuation of values,

beliefs, and customs, preserving collective memory and building a society that is more conscious of its rich identity.

The festivities of La Ursa expand the cultural horizon of the region, offering a window for a deep understanding of the traditions associated with these celebrations. This cultural immersion enriches the local landscape and strengthens cultural diversity. Cultural identity, a fundamental pillar of the community, is emphasized through these celebrations, which also have socioeconomic impacts by generating income and promoting local craftsmanship and popular art.

However, it was challenging to find authors who addressed the origin of La Ursa in detail, highlighting the need for further studies and research on this unique tradition.

This work serves as a preliminary document recording the presence of La Ursa in Pernambuco. The research highlighted the integration of the tradition's memories into design projects such as prints, masks, illustrations, souvenirs, and other expressions of contemporary Pernambuco design. Its aim was to strengthen and unify cultural identity, preserve traditions, and pass them on to future generations. Moving forward, the study intends to further develop its approach to affective memory through interviews with artisans and revelers, participant observation during the festivities, graphic analysis of artifacts identified as contributions to Pernambuco's graphic memory, and an in-depth exploration of their social contexts of use.

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