

# INTERVIEW with ARMANDO BERGALLO

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Léonard de Vinci - Uomo universale, acrylic on jute, 3.30 m x 4 m, Lalandusse, 2018

### INTERVIEW WITH ARMANDO BERGALLO

# The passion of a multi-faceted artist

The Uruguayan Armando Bergallo, a versatile artist living in Aquitaine, France, together with his friend Freek van Kleij, Director of Communication and Administrative organizer, has created a space dedicated exclusively to the proliferation of creative experiences in the middle of the French countryside in the Lot-et-Garonne in the Aquitaine region, 500 km southwest of Paris. They transformed two old grain warehouses into a studio and gallery, where the artist unleashes his explosive imagination. Once a year (except in 2020 due to the pandemic) they organize a mega exhibition, the last one held in 2019 under the theme « Lumière d'Aquitaine », brought together more than 300 people in the studio in Lalandusse. International collectors and art lovers came to discover the artist's latest creations. His extensive artistic career includes all manner of expression; painting, sculpture, art installations.

## HEBER PERDIGON

### **When was your passion for painting born?**

If we talk about passion, theatre and music were my great loves when I was a child. Painting caught up with me later at the age of 17 when I met my mentor José Gurvich.

### **Did you have any family influences related to the visual arts?**

No. My father was a doctor and his great passion was music. I remember large cardboard boxes full of very beautiful academic drawings from his student days, an excellent technique and something spiritual emanated from those works. For me it was the reflection of my father's soul, an exceptional man.

### **What training did you receive in Uruguay?**

In 1959, I began painting classes at the « Taller Torres García », led by José Gurvich. Later, four of his students went to work in the teacher's workshop in El Cerro, in a super intensive way. Gurvich was a painter, an inexhaustible source

of inspiration, a true poet. This beginning was decisive and all my energy and curiosity was focused on painting. Actually, it was more than a learning process it was the discovery of a way of life. Art and life were and are the same thing.

### **You were Co-Director of the « Taller de Montevideo » from 1963 to 1976. What did that experience give you?**

The « Taller de Montevideo » was founded in 1963 by four Gurvich students: Gorki Bollar, Clara Scremini, Hector Vilche and I. It's difficult to summarize in a few words what was an artistic and human experience, passionate, overwhelming, dramatic. Thus, four different pictorial personalities were modeled with a common denominator; the love of work. A creator must dream, but he must also be able to make his dreams come true. From this human and creative experience, I share to this day the beautiful friendship that unites me with Clara Scremini. I also remember with pleasure the warm support of the group of

students from the « Taller de Montevideo » ; who contributed to the creative dynamic of our young artistic adventure.

### **How did you get to Europe?**

In January 1966 with the « Taller de Montevideo » and with the inclusion of a new member, Ernesto Vila, we traveled to Europe after receiving an official invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, where we held our first exhibition in The Hague. In 1967 we discovered the kinetic work of Nicolas Schöffer in Paris. The same year the « Taller de Montevideo » moved to London, where we began a series of multi-disciplinary works, environmental art, street interventions, kinetic murals, in parallel with individual works of painting, sculpture and mural painting. These works were submitted at the Paris Biennale, Venice Biennale, Institute of Contemporary Art in London, Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. During this period (1969-1970) Bollar, Scremini and later Vila left the « Taller de Montevideo ». It is interesting to



note that the presentation at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago culminated with an ambitious project, connecting the cities of Chicago and New York in 24 hours through plastic elements, "The Cubes". The need for an encounter between art and a non-specialized public led us to create The Cubes. By going from the museum to the street we invited the people of Chicago to transform the urban environment by moving and building a change in their everyday reality; a metaphor for the possible transformation of society. The project begins at the Museum of Chicago, crosses the city and 24 hours later culminates with a monumental experience, « 100 Cubes in Central Park » in New York. The « Taller de Montevideo » created in London / Paris in 1971 « Las Semillas de la Aurora », a film that shows the socio-political panorama of Latin America, with an accent on the situation in Uruguay in the seventies. This film won, among other awards, the « Deuxième

Prix du Public des Rencontres Internationales, Film et Jeunesse de Cannes 1972 ». At that time it was impossible to present this film in Uruguay. Currently a digital copy is available in the MUME (Museum of Memory) in Montevideo.

**You lived in Amsterdam for a long time; some of your creations were marked by their avant-garde content. What was your artistic career like in Europe?**

In 1977 Vilche and I changed the name of the « Taller de Montevideo » to « Taller Amsterdam ». From that year we worked on the creation of contemporary operas. In these works we were both authors and directors, and in parallel we continued our individual work of painting, sculpture and art installations. My need to experiment with new disciplines led me to enter the stage physically as a performer. An enriching experience to be part

of the work as a whole.

In 1980 we presented « La Cité Transparente » in Paris at the Centre Georges Pompidou. During the week the work functioned as an art installation and every weekend we traveled from Amsterdam to Paris to 'liven up' «La Cité Transparente» with actors and musicians. The result was a one hour performance. The experience was extraordinary and I have fond memories of the emotion that flowed to us from the public. Spectators were on their feet standing around «La Cité Transparente» and the power of this close contact was repeated in the presentations we gave in London, Belgrade, Florence and Amsterdam. Vilche and I worked on an autobiography 'of two'. The result was the trilogy « The Desert » (a trip down memory lane), « The Night of the Third Day » (the vital strength of eroticism) and « Progress Passion » (the society, the justice).



**How did your constructivist training change into eclectic art expression?**

In 1980 my painting « Bacchus » marks the break with the constructive norms of my training. I went from a rejection of Naturalism, from Renaissance painting, even more so from Baroque painting to a desire to get almost physically close, in this example, to Caravaggio. From this painting onwards my art work has been eclectic, an uncontrollable desire for freedom. This is violently reflected in my art installation « Salomé » in 1983. The viewer entered a garden of blood. Salomé sang from a war tank, to John the Baptist, a text that I wrote for soprano with sound editing and guitar. All this wrapped up in a recording of my own voice of an improvised text in several languages: « Salome à la Vie - Salome à la Mort ». After completing a project in Berlin I felt the urge to create a

large painting, « Berlin, Winter 1933 ». It was a wake-up call to memory. The canvas is torn, revealing a city that is beginning to disappear, the cabaret continues while the tragedy of advancing fascism is announced.

**You have been living in the Aquitaine region for 20 years, surrounded by nature. How did this change come about?**

In 1999 Freek van Kleij and I bought a property in Aquitaine two hours from Bordeaux, the Atlantic, the Pyrenees and, thanks to the high-speed train, two hours fifteen minutes from Paris. An ideal place, with a climate exactly like Uruguay's: rolling landscapes and a privileged quality of life. In 2004 the « Taller Amsterdam » officially ceased to exist. During the latter years the creative flame in the « Taller Amsterdam » had started to die down and the time had come to start a new adventure.

In 2005 I started a new pictorial production motivated by the beautiful light here in Aquitaine. In parallel with the paintings I created three shows:

« Salomé », « Alice » and « Gulliver ». Freek took care of the production of this new autobiographical trilogy. Salomé speaks and sings about endless passion, Alice goes underground and discovers love, horror, joy, pain; in other words, life in all its darkness and its beautiful grandeur. Gulliver is a painter who refuses to enter the world of money and asserts his independence as a creator and as a human being.

**Does nature inspire you?**

In Aquitaine my inspiration does not stop for one moment. The vitality I experienced in this new period of my life is incredible. Thus, in my studio in Lalandusse a series of art installations emerged: « Le Fil d'Ariane », « Hercule »,



Cheval, acrylic on canvas, 4 m x 2 m, Expo Dodeca, Belgium, 2020

« Ville Polychrome », « Orfeo », « Animaux », « L'Infini » and currently « Natura ». Complete information about these works can be found on my internet site <https://www.armandobergallo.com/expositions-installations/>. These installations are accompanied by the creation of artworks, paintings, which share each theme. French television has made video recordings in Lalandusse which can also be seen on my internet site. Currently with Freek, we are preparing « Natura », a project that we hope - Covid 19 permitting - to present in our space in Lalandusse. The Belgian biologist Johan Geysen is collaborating with us in the « Natura » project. Johan is developing an alternative to paper and canvas: « Papur », a

sustainable, natural material. My first large-scale painting on Papur was presented at the beginning of 2020 in Belgium near Antwerp and - Covid 19 allowing - we hope to present a big project in the Belgian city of Ghent in 2021.

**Has the pandemic affected you in your creation?**

Of course. The surprising thing is that this terrible period has motivated me to create works that celebrate the opposite of the pandemic's darkness. That is, the affirmation of the beauty of nature, of the human being; all the positive energy we need when faced with such a catastrophe. For me it is not premeditated but an unavoidable response.

**Do you have a gallery that represents you?**

No. From the beginning in Montevideo my idea was that the public should come to my place of work. In Aquitaine the idea is clear, people come from near and far to my studio in Lalandusse. With Freek, we have built a loyal and enthusiastic public. Freek photographs every work I create and sends the images to our local, national and international mailing list. When we have a positive response from a person in charge of an artistic institution, presenting my work in new spaces is hugely satisfying and fortunately, in life, these encounters happen.



Orfeo. Atelier Lalandusse, 2013

**How would you define your work?**

As a strong desire to exist, to be alive, to be able to transmit this emotion to people willing to receive the message. The work can be figurative or not. I preciously retain the freedom to express myself without preconceptions, fashions or whatever. I don't feel the same in the morning as I do at night and every day is a new experience. It is inevitable that my work is, for myself, a surprise. I would like to finish by saying that I have had the great privilege to discover painting at the « Taller Torres García » and to be trained by an artist of José Gurvich's caliber.

My youth spent in Uruguay lives on in my memory with a very beautiful light. I must thank my country for all that it has so generously given me.

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