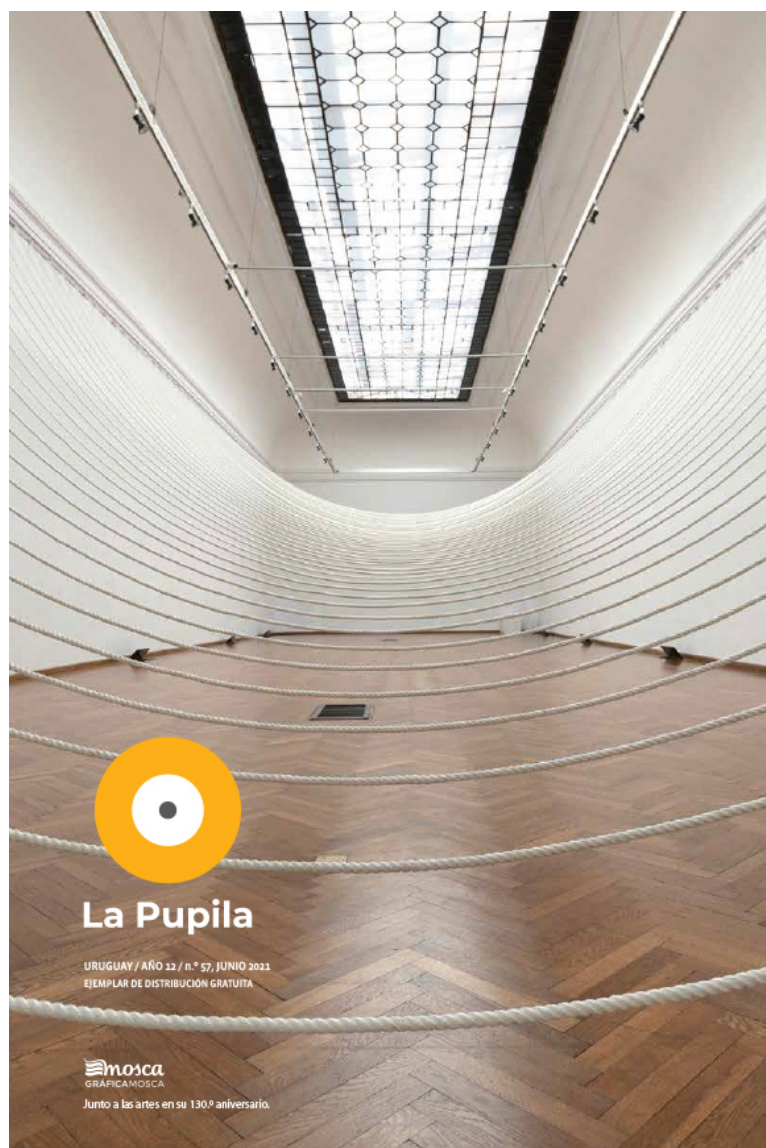


INTERVIEW with ARMANDO BERGALLO

by HEBER PERDIGON



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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 multiple artist

The Uruguayan Armando Bergallo, a versatile artist, living in Aquitaine, France, has created together with his friend Freek van Kleij, Director of Communication and Administrative organiser, a space dedicated exclusively to the multiplication of creative experiences in the middle of the French nature in the Aquitaine region, Lot-et-Garonne, 500 km southwest of Paris. They transformed two old grain warehouses into a workshop and gallery, where by 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 at the atelier in Lalandusse. International collectors and art lovers came to the place to discover the latest creations of the artist. His extensive artistic career includes all means of expression; painting and sculpture and art installations.

HEBER PERDIGON

When was your passion for painting born?

If we talk about passion, when I was a child, theatre and music were my great loves. Painting caught up with me later when I was 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. From his student days I remember large cardboard boxes full of very beautiful academic drawings, an excellent technique and something spiritual emanated from those works. For me it was the reflection of the soul of my father, 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 focused on painting. Actually, 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 leave you?

The « Taller de Montevideo » was founded in 1963 by four Gurvich students: Gorki Bollar, Clara Scremini, Hector Vilche and myself. 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 remember also with pleasure the warm support of the group of

students from the « Taller de Montevideo »; they contribute to the creative dynamics 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 » settled in London, where we began a series of multi-disciplinary works, environmental art, street interventions, kinetic mural, 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



Bellérophon, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 150 cm, 2016

mention 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. Going out of the museum to the street we invited the people of Chicago to transform the urban space by moving, building with The Cubes a change in the 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 presenting this film in Uruguay was impossible. 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 the content of avant-garde. How was your artistic career in Europe?

Vilche and I changed in 1977 the name of the « Taller de Montevideo » into « Taller Amsterdam ». Since that year we have been working on the creation of contemporary operas. In these works we are both authors and directors, and in parallel we continue our work individually in painting, sculpture and art installations. My need to experiment new disciplines led me to physically enter the stage spaces of the spectacles as a performer. An enriching

experience to be part of the total work.

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' the transparent city with actors and musicians. The result was a one hour performance. The experience was extraordinary and I keep fondly in my memory the emotion that the public transmitted to us. Spectators were standing around « La Cité Transparente » and the strength of this direct contact was repeated in the presentations we made in London, Belgrade, Florence and Amsterdam. Vilche and I worked on an autobiography 'of two'. The result was the trilogy « The Desert » (journey into memory), « The Night of the Third Day » (the vital strength of erotism) and « Progress Passion » (the society, the justice).



How did your constructivist training change into eclectic plastic expression?

In 1980 my painting « Bacchus » marks the break with the constructive norms of my formation. I went from the rejection of Naturalism, from Renaissance painting, even more so from the Baroque into a desire to approach almost physically, in this example, to Caravaggio. After this painting on my art work will be 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: « Salomé à la Vie - Salomé 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, allowing a city to emerge that begins to disappear, the cabaret continues while announcing the tragedy of advancing fascism.

You are living in the Aquitaine region for 20 years, surrounded by nature. How was this change generated?

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, undulating landscapes and a privileged quality of life. In 2004 the « Taller Amsterdam » officially ceased to exist. During the last years the creative fire in the « Taller Amsterdam » had started to calm down and the time had come to start a new adventure.

Since 2005 I have started a new pictorial production motivated by the beautiful light of Aquitaine.

Parallel to the plastic works I created three spectacles: « Salomé », « Alice » and « Gulliver ». Freek took care of the production of this new autobiographical trilogy. Salomé talks and sings about passion without limits, Alice entered the earth and discovers love, horror, joy, pain; that is to say, life with its part of shadows and it's beautiful greatness. Gulliver is a painter who refuses to enter the world of money and affirms his independence as a creator and as a human being.

Did nature inspire you?

In Aquitaine my inspiration does not stop for a moment. The vitality I experienced in this new period of my life is incredible. Thus, in my atelier 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 plastic works, 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 obliges - to present in our space in Lalandusse. The Belgian biologist Johan Geysen collaborates with us in the « Natura » project. Johan develops an alternative to paper and canvas: « Papur », a

Sustainable, Circular Material. My first large-scale painting on Papur was presented at the beginning of 2020 in Belgium near Antwerp and - if the Covid allows it - we hope to present in 2021 a big project also in Belgium in the city of Ghent.

Has the pandemic affected you in your creation?

Naturally. The surprising thing is that this terrible period has motivated me to create works that exalt the opposite of the darkness of the pandemic. That is, the affirmation of the beauty of nature, of the human being; everything that carries the positive energy that we need to feel, facing such a catastrophe. For me it is not premeditated but an unavoidable response.

Do you have a gallery that you represent?

No. From the beginning in Montevideo my idea was that the public should come to my atelier. In Aquitaine the idea is clearing people come from far and near to my atelier in Lalandusse. With Freek, we have built a loyal and enthusiastic public. Freek photographs every work I do and sends the image to our local, national and international mailinglist. When the contact with a person in charge of an artistic institution is positive, presenting my work in new spaces is a great satisfaction and fortunately, in life, these encounters occur.



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 this 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 unavoidable 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 having been formed by an artist of the dimension of José Gurvich.

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

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