

A Half-Hearted Expressionist Extortion

Representations of Barbarism in Uruguay Between 1920 and 1960

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Abstract

This article traces the genealogy of Expressionism in Uruguay as an artistic form that, within the framework of a figurative art trend of social and popular orientation, questioned the hegemonic guidelines regarding the cultural identity under construction in the first half of the twentieth century. Taking as an example the representation of the rural

landscape and the *gaucho*, the article describes the incorporation of Expressionist principles and values to reveal both the persistence of the primitive in the project of the modern nation and the consequences of the incipient industrialization on the human experience.

Background

[1] One of the concerns of current historical accounts of Latin America is the reformulation of traditional histories. As Andrea Giunta and George Flaherty suggest, there is an 'historiographic turn'¹ in which many researchers attempt to deconstruct established narratives by proposing perspectives that allow the reconstruction of histories that were never fully ascertained or that remain opaque or hidden in conventional narratives. With this aim, they establish genealogies that map the imbalances and absences from a multidisciplinary perspective, proposing new paradigms concerning the relations between European and Latin American metropolises, where the art of the region is no longer an illegitimate child of modernity, but a place of subversion by means of simultaneous avant-gardes.

[2] This article joins this line of work by providing a critical review of the participation of Uruguayan artists in the international Expressionist movement. For, although some critics and art historians had already pointed out the international character of the movement,² only very recently have the assumptions that presented it as a specifically German contribution to Modern art been reformulated.³ It was only in 2019, with the publication of *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a Transnational Context*, that Expressionism fully resumed its nature as a "form of artistic practice contextually situated but geographically unrestricted by European art and culture of the twentieth century".⁴ That is, a movement that had its original expression in Germany between 1905 and 1920,⁵ later expanding internationally in successive waves up to the late 1950s.⁶

[3] This recognition implies acknowledging that expressionism adopted different modalities in the modern artistic practice and cultural production, presenting variations in its name and even in its features. With an almost messianic approach⁷ and a defined plastic language,⁸ the artists developed an art whose main characteristic was "a distortion of reality – in shape, in color, or in both – destined to vigorously highlight those elements of reality that the painter wishes the spectator to see".⁹ However, its practice developed

¹ Andrea Giunta and George Flaherty, "Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn", in: *Art in Translation* 9 (2017), 121-142.

² Bernard Denvir, *El fauvismo y el expresionismo*, Barcelona 1957, 45; Herbert Read, *A concise history of modern painting*, London 1974, 231; Jorge Romero Brest, *La pintura europea contemporánea (1900–1950)*, México 1958, 47; Julio Payró, *Introducción a la pintura expresionista*, Buenos Aires 1970, 85.

³ Marcelo Rodríguez, "La constante expresionista en la pintura chilena", in: *Arte y crisis en Iberoamérica: Jornadas de Historia del Arte en Chile*, eds. Fernando Guzmán, Gloria Cortéz and Juan Manuel Martínez, Santiago de Chile 2004, 315-324: 315.

⁴ Isabel Wünsche, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a Transnational Context*, New York 2019, 1.

⁵ Dietmar Elger, *Expresionismo*, Köln 2007, 8.

⁶ Romero Brest (1958), 47.

⁷ Lionel Richard, *Del expresionismo al nazismo. Arte y cultura desde Guillermo II hasta la República de Weimar*, Barcelona 1979, 19; Peter Vergo, "Brücke: ¿un puente hacia el 'superhombre'?", in: *Expresionismo Brücke: Actas del Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza 4*, ed. Aya Soika, Madrid 2005, 19-36: 32; Ulrike Lorenz, *Brücke*, Köln 2008, 19.

⁸ Maria Frick, "Expresionismo del Sur: hacia la definición de un arte propio", in: *ILLAPA Mana Tukukuq* 16 (2019), 86-97.

⁹ Julio Payró, *Héroes del color: vida, obra, teorías y gravitación de los maestros postimpresionistas fundadores del arte contemporáneo*, Buenos Aires 1951, 117.

distinct characteristics in each socio-historical context, according to the balances achieved in the frame of modernism between the progressive elements and the artistic traditions of local nature.

[4] In line with the notion of simultaneous vanguards,¹⁰ this new perspective enabled the Expressionist movement approach in artistic practice and modern cultural production in Latin America, challenging traditional narratives – centred mainly on artistic styles and national movements – and proposing the consideration of art from a decentralized point of view, open to the interchange and collaboration of different agents in multiple directions and at several moments in time. This is especially relevant in Uruguay, where there are still limitations in the analysis of marginal artistic forms concerning mainstream trends,¹¹ or in the questioning of historical guidelines regarding the national cultural identity.¹² This paper reconstructs the Expressionist genealogy in Uruguay based on some key historiographical statements, identifying the characteristics and innovations proposed by this artistic trend at a local level. It particularly addresses the expressionist influence through its "defense of the barbarian", which Lionel Richard defines as the "desire to reach the natural element of man, his inner truth and his capacity for emotion".¹³

[5] In opposition to the social conventions and academic traditions of their time, the expressionist painters "rejected impressionism and naturalism in favor of a primitivizing aesthetic that fused inspiration derived from the works of Munch, van Gogh, and the fauves with influences from Gothic art and African and Oceanic sculpture".¹⁴ In these sources they found values and forms that questioned the superiority of the occidental approaches and social conventions of the bourgeois world. But many artists also incorporated elements of the popular traditions,¹⁵ native and indigenous characters,¹⁶ and rural motifs¹⁷ of their own contexts in order to visualize them as authentic components of the national identity in the frame of the different modernization processes.

[6] Based on this evidence, this article assumes that, even if the incorporation of Expressionist principles and forms did not mean a radical confrontation with artistic institutions, their influence in Uruguay cannot be underestimated as it functioned as a vehicle for channeling political and social statements, whether by opposing traditional models in art or by searching a new identity, unlike the one proposed by the political conservatism of the first modernity. This is shown in the analysis of the work of a group of artists who – in a similar process to those occurred in other contexts – highlighted the figure of the *gaucho* revealing the persistence of the primitive in the project of the modern nation and the consequences of the incipient industrialization on the human experience.

¹⁰ Andrea Giunta, *Contra el canon. El arte contemporáneo en un mundo sin centro*, Buenos Aires 2020.

¹¹ Rodríguez (2004), 315.

¹² Jacqueline Lacasa, *Influencia: arte contemporáneo en el Uruguay del siglo XXI*, Montevideo 2015, 12.

¹³ Richard (1979), 19.

¹⁴ Wünsche (2019), 7.

¹⁵ Konstantin Akinsha, "A comedy of errors: Russian Cubo-Futurism as an example of creative misunderstanding", in: *Expressionism in Germany and France. From Matisse to Blaue Reiter*, ed. Timothy Benson, Zurich 2014, 13-26.

¹⁶ Lisa Horstmann, "The Expressionist Roots of South African Modernism", in: Isabel Wünsche (2019), 525-541; Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja, "Expressionism in Sámi Art: John Savio's Woodcuts of the 1920s and 1930s", in: Wünsche (2019), 543-256.

¹⁷ Timo Huuski and Tutta Palin, "Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the Discourses on Expressionism in Finland: From the November Group to Ina Behrsen-Colliander", in: Wünsche (2019), 222-242.

Expressionism in Uruguayan historiography

[7] Despite the Expressionist dissemination in the region,¹⁸ in Uruguay this movement was not explicitly part of the national narrative until 2001, when Ángel Kalenberg published *Los expresionistas*,¹⁹ identifying a group of painters who retrieved the human figure in the 1980s. This work, however, does not acknowledge the precedents that gave rise to such local neo-expressionism, nor does it identify the codes and values that characterize it. In order to reconstruct its genealogy, it is therefore crucial to rekindle specific contributions to the field of criticism and local art history concerning the previous period. Although tenuous and sometimes elusive, they become key elements when tracing Expressionism in the national cultural debate.

[8] This journey begins in the 1920s, when considerations on national painting privileged a political, ethical and social point of view in the assessment and interpretation of art, with a certain romantic and messianic flair about its social function. Hand in hand with the regionalist Americanism of the time, and with a strong emphasis on the literary, the discussions then revolved around what in Uruguay was known as 'nativism'. Although with a weaker philosophical support than the one it enjoyed in other Latin American countries (as was the case with indigenism), during these years the Uruguayan countryside was represented "with an intent to enlarge the spiritual resonance of the primitive and rustic ways of how the *gaucho* was seen".²⁰ With a proposal that was essentially aesthetic, the landscape was incorporated with its most objectified data (the *mate*, the ranch and the vast expanse), with an emotional and neo-romantic flair that emphasized the picturesque and the folkloric, thus collaborating in the creation of what was simultaneously national and American.

[9] Given that during those years "barbarization" was seen as the beginning of a new sensitivity in opposition to traditional rationalism,²¹ in some cases nativism also incorporated aesthetic procedures and attitudes of the European avant-garde so as to express the native and regional reality.²² In this sense, there are those who argue that Expressionism was latent in Pedro Figari's earlier work (*Cambacuá*, ca. 1923;²³ *Hunting*, ca. 1922;²⁴ *Lament*, 1924;²⁵), which broke with the rationalist discourse of his generation. In fact, despite the fact that his painting was largely considered a spontaneous phenomenon of local art, there is no doubt that Figari's work assumed the symbolism, as well as the power of the post-impressionist and expressionist colour.²⁶

¹⁸ María Frick, "Expressionism in Latin America and Its Contribution to the Modernist Discourse", in: Wünsche (2019), 507-524.

¹⁹ Ángel Kalenberg, *Arte Uruguayo de los maestros a nuestros días - Los expresionistas*, V.12, Montevideo 2011.

²⁰ Fernando Aínsa, *Tiempo reconquistado: siete ensayos sobre literatura uruguaya*, Montevideo 1977, 3.

²¹ Ivonne Pini, *En busca de lo propio: inicios de la modernidad en el arte de Cuba, México, Uruguay y Colombia 1920-1930*, Bogotá 2000, 152.

²² Aínsa (1977), 52.

²³ Pedro Figari, *Cambacuá*, ca. 1923, oil on cardboard, 69 x 99 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 960. (Images of the MNAV collection can be accessed on <http://acervo.mnav.gub.uy>).

²⁴ Pedro Figari, *Hunting*, ca. 1922, oil on cardboard, 50 x 70 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1990.

²⁵ Pedro Figari, *Lament*, 1924, oil on cardboard, 53 x 68.3 cm. MNBA, Buenos Aires, online inventory no. 9233.

[10] Already in the 1940s, Eduardo Dieste²⁷ began to analyse the artistic fact within a conceptual framework that avoided what was circumstantial and surpassed the philosophical judgments on the beautiful and the ugly. Although he only made a fleeting reference to Expressionism, he characterized the movement based on the dimensions of "stupor" and "surface", attributing to it the values of "ecstatic, suppression of the object, extravagance, loud, large forms", abandoning the analysis of these attributes in the rest of his text.²⁸ Something similar occurs with Fernando García Esteban,²⁹ who stated that the Parisian avant-garde was a starting point for local art, and emphasized the internationalization process of this trend, albeit not connecting it with Uruguayan art.

[11] It is only with the Argentinian Jorge Romero Brest that a more complete reflection on the influence of this artistic trend is found. With a relevant activity in Uruguay, he made the first reference to a "beginning of Expressionism" in local art, within a certain literary and sentimental naturalism. In particular, Romero Brest catalogued as "creationist" the works that he considered to correspond to an "expressive objectivism", that is, those that "remain in objective representation; but extract from natural or artificial objects a new, spiritual expression that transforms them according to the lyrical or dramatic will that drives them".³⁰

[12] Another Argentinian, Julio Payró, made a similar contribution. He proposed perhaps the clearest definition of the expressionist movement – which he defines as "objective expressionism" to underline its differences with the other movements – as well as its significance in the painting of Latin America.³¹ Although he never referred to the phenomenon in Uruguay, in his courses at Universidad de la República, he included topics such as the manifestations of the Nordic spirit, the influence of Gauguin in Germany, the contrast between functional architecture and pictorial "instinctivism", and the concept of "degenerate art".³²

[13] The most powerful observations regarding the Uruguayan participation in the international Expressionist movement are, however, those made by José Pedro Argul.³³ This author not only speaks clearly of a local Expressionist influence, but also links it with three of the most recognized painters in Uruguayan art, without implying their detachment from other vernacular trends. He argues, for example, that José Cuneo conforms to the "much commented valuation of telluric elements as a means of establishing a South American culture", at the same time as he compares Cuneo's silent moons caressing

²⁶ Jorge Alberto Manrique, "Identidad o modernidad?", in: *América Latina en sus Artes*, ed. Damián Bayón, México 1974, 19-33: 22.

²⁷ Eduardo Dieste, *Teseo. Los problemas del arte*, Buenos Aires 1940.

²⁸ Dieste (1940), 176.

²⁹ Fernando García Esteban, "La escuela de París y Nuestro Medio Artístico", in: *Marcha* December 30 (1949), 22-23.

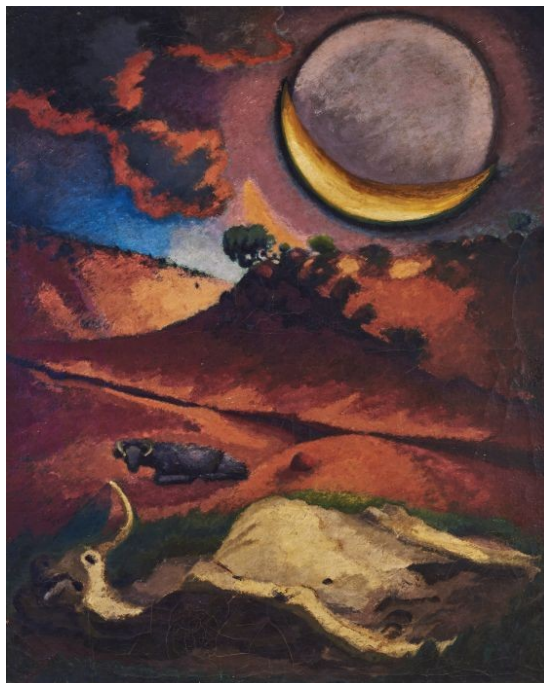
³⁰ Jorge Romero Brest, ed., *El primer Salón Municipal de Artes Plásticas en Montevideo*, exh.cat. Montevideo 1940, 6.

³¹ Payró (1951), 117.

³² Julio Payró, "Concepto de Moralidad en las Artes Plásticas", course syllabus, Montevideo 1946, <http://humanidades-digitales.fhuce.edu.uy/files/original/acf79985375d45a4cf980650371947a2.PDF> (accessed June 10 2021).

³³ José Pedro Argul, *Las artes plásticas del Uruguay: desde la época indígena al momento contemporáneo*, Montevideo 1966.

death itself to the sensitive and resounding warfare ghosts of European Expressionism (*Farewell*, ca. 1931;³⁴ *Florida Suburbs*, 1931;³⁵ *Moon and Bones*, ca. 1933). (Fig. 1).



1 José Cuneo, *Moon and Bones*, ca. 1933, oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm, Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales (MNAV) (photograph provided by MNAV)

[14] As stated by Argul, with the ranches, with the moons, with the passing cattle that in his Uruguayan watercolours move like geological forces, with the decayed flesh of animals that are absorbed by the bosom of the earth, this painter offers Universal art the South American equivalent of Expressionism, a painful reactor to the previous joyful images of Impressionism. In doing so, this unique artist masterfully documents "the painful commotion of man between the two wars and the danger of his anxiety".³⁶

[15] Argul also referred to the expressionist nature of some works by Rafael Barradas, in particular some of his *Magníficos* series on popular characters (*Aragonese Miller*, 1924;³⁷ *Castilians*, ca. 1925;³⁸ *Catalan Mason*, 1927;³⁹) or his mystical period (*Virgin and Child*, 1928;⁴⁰ *Three Marys*, ca. 1928;⁴¹ *Omen*, 1928;⁴²), a view also shared years later by the critic Nelson Di Maggio.⁴³

³⁴ José Cuneo, *Farewell*, ca. 1931, oil on panel, 146 x 97 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1671.

³⁵ José Cuneo, *Florida Suburbs*, 1931, oil on panel, 73 x 100 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1681.

³⁶ Argul (1966), 115.

³⁷ Rafael Barradas, *Aragonese Miller*, 1924, oil on canvas, 117 x 75 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 3103.

³⁸ Rafael Barradas, *Castilians*, ca. 1925, oil on canvas, 55 x 67 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1618.

³⁹ Rafael Barradas, *Catalan mason*, 1927, oil on canvas, 100 x 75 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1612.

⁴⁰ Rafael Barradas, *Virgin and Child*, 1928, oil on canvas, 63 x 47 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1624.

⁴¹ Rafael Barradas, *Three Marys*, ca. 1928, oil on canvas, 63 x 47 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 3107.

⁴² Rafael Barradas, *Omen*, 1928, oil on canvas, 62 x 47 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1625.

*In the figuration of human beings, in the types of people that connect Barradas to the Belgian Expressionists [...] Men in bistros, Basque millers from San Juan de la Luz or the Hispanic coast, millers from Aragon, priests and peasants, all of them impose a gravity to the series of their presences without gestures or rictus, with their eyes always empty, with an eternal soul [...] achieving with some of the hardened Spanish lives, works of a significant Expressionist relevance that relates them to those of the Belgian Constant Permeke.*⁴⁴

[16] A third mention made by Argul refers to the influence that "Negro art" had on Carlos Alberto Castellanos,⁴⁵ whose works from the 1920s and 1930s (*Beach*, ca. 1930;⁴⁶ *Annunciation*, ca. 1930;⁴⁷ *The Pilgrim*, ca. 1920;⁴⁸) could relate to the Expressionist movement. Although unexplored at the time, the connection was commented on years later by Nelson Di Maggio:

*He was not unaware of the chromatic violence of the Fauves and Expressionists [...] or of the energetic signs of African tribal art [...] Castellanos anticipated the postmodern condition, close to German neo-expressionism [...] in works of various lineages.*⁴⁹

[17] However, Argul fails to identify the possible followers or supporters of this South American Expressionism, which seems to disappear with the artists themselves. Neither does he proceed to identify the plastic elements and expressive modalities typical of this movement or address the main principles of its critical discourse. It is only in the early 1990s that Gabriel Peluffo Linari resumes the analysis and critical thinking concerning national art and identifies other Expressionist contributions worth mentioning.⁵⁰

[18] Peluffo Linari argues that Expressionism was one of the movements that, along with Latin American influences, the Social Realism of the Soviet Union, and the United States' Muralism and Realism, contributed to the development of a figurative art trend that sought various approaches to social and popular themes. In this line were artists such as José Bravo⁵¹ and Leandro Castellanos Balparda,⁵² to whom Peluffo Linari attributed distinctive features of the commented drawings of Georg Grosz, in addition to others such as Pedro Miguel Astapenco, who came to lean on a more orthodox German Expressionism. Later, Peluffo Linari also pointed out the Expressionist bias of Cuneo's "unprecedented view of the rural

⁴³ Nelson Di Maggio, *Artes Visuales en Uruguay: diccionario crítico*, Montevideo 2017, 44.

⁴⁴ Argul (1966), 138.

⁴⁵ Argul (1966), 110.

⁴⁶ Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *Beach*, ca. 1930, oil on cardboard, 56 x 70 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1954.

⁴⁷ Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *Annunciation*, ca. 1930, oil on cardboard, 64 x 54 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1955.

⁴⁸ Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *The Pilgrim*, ca. 1920, oil on canvas, 39 x 29 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1959.

⁴⁹ Di Maggio (2017), 72.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Peluffo Linari, ed. *Realismo social en el arte uruguayo, 1930 – 1950*, exh.cat., Montevideo 1992.

⁵¹ José Bravo, *Washerwomen*, 1943, pencil and ink on paper, 70 x 57 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2750.

⁵² Leandro Castellanos Balparda, *Composition*, 1936, woodcut, 16.5 x 14 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2265.

Uruguayan landscape"; Luis Scolpini's⁵³ contacts with the "new German figuration"; the German origin of "a new modality of a dark painting, inclined sometimes to subtle transparencies as well as to thick strokes" in Luis Mazzei; the restless and distressed soul of Carlos Prevosti; the "pervious and extended" teachings of artists such as Miguel Angel Pareja and Oscar Garcia Reino.⁵⁴

[19] According to the author, this expressive angle had its precedents in the late 1920s and flourished between 1930 and 1950, although later it continued to manifest itself in a rather mellow manner in both painting and etching. Although he does not delve deeper into the characteristics or legacy of this aspect of the new figuration either, he leaves the possibility of its coexistence with different artistic tendencies open, especially from the late 1940s, when the consolidation of what he calls a "cult of individuality and a certain rejection of the school spirit" takes place.⁵⁵

A change of moral and plastic values

[20] Thus, despite the fact that local historiography usually considers the 1930s as "an unsuccessful and dark stage of the national plastic arts",⁵⁶ during those years material and moral values were generated that would later surface in the intellectual milieu.⁵⁷ Moreover, it is in this period that the development of a new figuration put into practice, among other approaches, expressionist values and forms in order to question the political and moralizing intention of nativism, as well as the archetypes of bourgeois ideology regarding the construction of a 'motherland'.

[21] In 1930 the country entered a phase of social, political and economic deterioration that broke with the prosperity experienced in the 1920s. Along with the consequences of the 1929 world crisis, in 1933 Uruguay went through the coup d'état by Gabriel Terra, which generated a commotion of a large part of the system of symbols and significations identified with the previous" period.⁵⁸ The exaltation of values such as democracy, legalism, reformism, security, integration, and optimism became estranged from the social reality, impacted by the severe economic and political crisis.

[22] During the first two decades of the twentieth century, modernization in economic and social matters had developed in the frame of an exclusionary and hegemonic political system.⁵⁹ And, even if later there was a remarkable reformulation of the political institutions, the persistent effects of the crisis of the postwar, the significant demographic and social transformations, and the typical ambiguities and malfunctions of the model itself gave rise to a powerful process of social and economic polarization.⁶⁰ The

⁵³ Luis Scolpini, *Gaucha*, 1931, sanguine on paper, 32 x 26 cm, private collection.

⁵⁴ Gabriel Peluffo Linari, *Historia de la Pintura Uruguaya – Tomo 2: Representaciones de la modernidad (1930–1960)*, Montevideo 1999 (2), 52-57.

⁵⁵ Peluffo Linari (1999 (2)), 94.

⁵⁶ Peluffo Linari (1992), 5.

⁵⁷ Peluffo Linari (1999 (2)), 98.

⁵⁸ Gerado Caetano and Milita Alfaro, *Historia del Uruguay contemporáneo: materiales para el debate*, Montevideo 1995, 159.

⁵⁹ Jaime Yaffé, "La modernización en el Uruguay: política y economía, 1876–1933", in: *Histórias Regionais do Cone Sul*, ed. Flavio Heinz and Rolando Herrlein, Santa Cruz do Sul 2003, 323-340.

⁶⁰ Caetano and Alfaro (1995), 161.

country was also a distant witness to the Spanish Civil War as well as the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. This caused the breakup of many artists and intellectuals with the moral foundations of Western culture, as well as a debate on a possible new World War and the role of Marxism as source of a new redeeming and anti-war humanism. Although it did not have the firm and almost aggressive sense that was observed in Europe, the local culture developed a modern attitude in some specific areas, reaching levels of intransigence and polarization similar to the radicalism of the European avant-garde discourses of the 1910s and 1920s.⁶¹ This process was especially evident in the late post-war European "isms" influence, with the consolidation of a new low and melancholic palette, which questioned the eclectic balance and agreements of the political and aesthetic pact that took place in Uruguay driven by the two-time president José Batlle y Ordóñez. As Peluffo Linari describes:

*A kind of half-hearted expressionist extortion was introduced in the national plastic arts at the end of the 1930s, which to a large extent was not only tributary to some specific influences of European artists, but was also encouraged by the unease caused by the disaster of war, which signified the crisis or instability of cultural references in large part of the Uruguayan intellectual field.*⁶²

[23] As in other parts of Latin America, this art exposed injustices, fought against human deferments and somehow pushed the "creole activism"⁶³ that would flourish in the 1960s. At the time, painter Felipe Seade explained that "our generation must be fully involved in human drama because [...] we were born in a time of bombs and cannon blasts, and we cannot deceive the public with well-lit photographs and landscapes".⁶⁴

[24] In plastic terms, this opinion meant a clear estrangement from Planism, a local school characterized by a confident and optimistic worldview, nurtured in an encouraging social reality, sustained in the values of the land and in a socio-political situation of relative peace, work and prosperity.⁶⁵ With a rational composition that did not go so far as to violate the figurative integrity of the objects, Planism used a pure and strident palette that gave symbolic prominence to light as an aesthetic foundation of a transparent modern soul, without 'dark' or 'hidden' areas. As Peluffo Linari explains:

*[Planism] was characterized – following French guidelines – by the rejection of the tortuous, the dramatic, the depressive or the "expressionist", in the sense the latter term could assume, for example, in the German graphic arts and painting of the 1920s. In short, a rejection of the "inadequate forms of sensitivity" [...] meant, as a counterpart, the enthusiastic compliance with affirmative, flattering feelings of the world.*⁶⁶

[25] The change this stance brought about in the path of Uruguayan art is particularly clear when the representation of the human drama is seen through themes or actors that represent the most dispossessed, forgotten or ignored in the path to modernity. This is the case, among other possible ones, of

⁶¹ Fernando García Esteban, *Artes plásticas del Uruguay en el siglo veinte*, Montevideo 1970; William Rey, "Melancolía y metafísica. Arquitectura uruguaya en tiempos de incertidumbre global", in: *Vitruvia. Revista del IHA* Year 7, 6 (2020), 17-34.

⁶² Peluffo Linari (1999 (2)), 97.

⁶³ Daniel Vidart, Poesía y campo: del nativismo a la protesta, in: *Capítulo Oriental* 23, 353-367: 359.

⁶⁴ Peluffo Linari (1992), 10.

⁶⁵ Pinni (2000), 164.

⁶⁶ Gabriel Peluffo Linari, *Historia de la Pintura Uruguaya – Tomo 1: El imaginario nacional- regional (1830–1930)*, Montevideo 1999 (1), 89.

the washerwomen, who were also approached by national artists of the stature of Milo Beretta or Melchor Méndez Magariños, of academic and planist tendencies, respectively. In works like *Washerwomen in Paraguay* (ca. 1922)⁶⁷ or *Washerwomen* (ca. 1922),⁶⁸ they presented women who carried out their tasks in a peaceful, almost idyllic or romantic way. In both examples the figures appear from the back or with anonymous faces and seem to be part of a stable, illuminated and peaceful landscape, completely different from the one posed later by Felipe Seade or Pedro Miguel Astapenco. In *Figure* (1944)⁶⁹ or *Shoreline washerwoman* (1949) (Fig. 2) women are alone, facing the observer, with their faces fully visible, in an apparently hostile landscape. The outline and monumentality of the forms demonstrate the weight of their burden, in a setting in which the social problem (formerly faceless and their backs turned) overlaps the landscape (formerly idyllic and peaceful) that, with the effects of tonality and colour modulation, seems threatening or, at best, indifferent.



2 Pedro Miguel Astapenco, *Shoreline Washerwoman*, 1949, oil on panel, 141 x 81 cm, Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales (MNAV), Montevideo (photograph provided by Andrés Oberti Rual)

[26] On the other hand, unlike other tendencies that fed social realism at the local level, the Expressionist tendency was also characterized by revaluing the primitive, both in opposition to the prevailing positivism and rationalism and to the internalized bourgeois sensibility in the previous decades. In the process of consolidating a modern nation, attempts had been made to leave behind the ways of being, thinking and feeling typical of a colonial society, generally accused of barbarian, which was assigned a geographic and value content related to the rural milieu. Different sectors of society shared at that time the horror of

⁶⁷ Milo Beretta, *Washerwomen in Paraguay*, n.d., oil on canvas, 49 x 57 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2939.

⁶⁸ Melchor Méndez Magariños, *Washerwomen*, ca. 1922, oil on panel, 40 x 48 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 3891.

⁶⁹ Felipe Seade, *Figure*, 1944, oil on fiber, 200 x 114 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2754.

demonstrating feelings, physical violence, uncontrolled and picaresque sexuality, the casual body and exposed death, considered as features of barbarism⁷⁰ and to which local Expressionism – although lukewarm – would expose them ruthlessly.

[27] As in the rest of Latin America this is evident in works that explicitly and bluntly address the tragedy of war; amongst them, *1941* (1941) by José María Pagani,⁷¹ *Landscape (Korea, 1950)* (1951) by Juan Vieytes,⁷² *May '59* (1959) by Enrique Volpe,⁷³ *French Refugees* (1949)⁷⁴ and *Bombing over Peasants* (1947)⁷⁵ by Pedro Miguel Astapenco, *Refugees* (1942) by Eduardo Vernazza,⁷⁶ *Vision* (1949) by Johannes Gurewitsch⁷⁷ and, later, *Dead Bodies* (1957) by Anhele Hernández,⁷⁸ *The displaced* (1959) by Andrés Feldman⁷⁹ or *Untitled (Down with the W...)* (n.d.) by Carlos Prevosti.⁸⁰ But it is also evident in works that address the circus theme as a space for comedy and human tragedy, as is the case of the series by Castellanos (*Dancers*, n.d.;⁸¹ *Red and Green Harlequin*, n.d.⁸²) and Manuel Rosé (*Clown with White Horse*, 1956;⁸³ *Clown in Lilac and Green*; n.d.⁸⁴) or specific works such as *Circus* by Fernando Laens⁸⁵ or *Untitled (Circus)* (1949) by Carlos Prevosti.⁸⁶

[28] The renewed value of the barbarian also appears in some works that represent carnival motifs, such as *Drummer* (ca. 1940) by Carlos Alberto Castellanos,⁸⁷ *Conga* (1943) by Carlos Prevosti,⁸⁸ *Mestizas* (1948) by

⁷⁰ José Pedro Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay: 1800–1860. La cultura "bárbara"* – Vol. 1, Montevideo 1991, 29.

⁷¹ José María Pagani, *1941*, 1941, oil on canvas, 155 x 150 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2755.

⁷² Juan Fernando Vieytes, *Landscape (Korea, 1950)*, 1951, oil on fiber, 80 x 100 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2535.

⁷³ Enrique Volpe, *May '59*, 1959, oil on cardboard, 90 x 69 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2153.

⁷⁴ Pedro Miguel Astapenco, *French Refugees*, 1949, ink on paper, 24.5 x 28 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2396.

⁷⁵ Pedro Miguel Astapenco, *Bombing over peasants*, 1947, pen on paper. No information. Image available in the catalogue of the XI National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1947, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=011> (accessed June 19, 2021).

⁷⁶ Eduardo Vernazza, *Refugees*, 1942, Indian ink, 76 x 108 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1038.

⁷⁷ Juan (Johannes Boris) Gurewitsch, *Vision*, 1949, Indian ink. Collection of the Banco República del Uruguay, Montevideo. Image available in the catalogue of the XIII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1949, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=015> (accessed June 19, 2021).

⁷⁸ Anhele Hernández, *Dead bodies*, 1957, lithograph, 29 x 34.5 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1736.

⁷⁹ Andrés Feldman, *The displaced*, 1959, Indian ink, 46 x 58 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2613.

⁸⁰ Carlos Prevosti, *Untitled (down with the w ...)*, n.d., gouache, 32.5 x 36 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 5280.

⁸¹ Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *Dancers*, n.d., oil on canvas, 51 x 51 cm. Private collection.

⁸² Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *Harlequin red and green*, n.d., oil on fiber, 35 x 47 cm. Private collection.

⁸³ Manuel Rose, *Clown with white horse*, 1956, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1850.

⁸⁴ Manuel Rose, *Clown in lilac and green*, n.d., oil on fiber, 88 x 74 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1862.

⁸⁵ Fernando Laens, *Circus*, 1949, oil. No information. Image available in the catalogue of the XII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1948, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=013> (accessed June 19, 2021).

⁸⁶ Carlos Prevosti, *Untitled (Circus)*, engraving, 15 x 20 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 5269.

Adolfo Halty,⁸⁹ *Pocitos Carnival* (1958) by Felipe Seade⁹⁰ and *Lubolos* (1943) by Manuel Colazo Castro.⁹¹ Despite their plastic differences, they represent traditions, rhythms and festivities linked to the Afro-descendant community, that were slowly becoming popular and catching up with the Montevideo bourgeoisie. On the other hand, examples such as *Drummer*, by Castellanos, also incorporate what María Raquel Pereda defined as "the rebirth of the natural",⁹² understood as "the enjoyment of the body itself, in how it expresses strength, energy, sex, harmony" – a trend that appears much more explicitly in works such as *Untitled (Figures)* (n.d.) by Carlos Prevosti.⁹³

[29] In line with the international expressionist movement, another recurrent theme is religion, present in works such as *Adoration* (ca. 1952) by María Rosa de Ferrari,⁹⁴ *Desolation* (ca. 1956) by Nelsa Solano Gorga⁹⁵, *Exaltation* (1949) by Fernando Laens⁹⁶, *Prophet* (1956)⁹⁷ and *King David* (1954)⁹⁸ by Fernando Halty, *The Adoration of the Magi and the Shepherds* (1928)⁹⁹ and the aforementioned works by Rafael Barradas and Carlos Alberto Castellanos. Despite the fact that in some cases religious fervour can be considered as a typical hegemonic narrative, it edges barbarism when it occurs within the framework of a political model such as the Uruguayan, which proposes a strict secularity and, consequently, has particularly few works of this tenor.

[30] Finally, landscape is another area where a certain expressionist presence is observed. Although in this case the influence is subtler, there are examples that display the incorporation of certain values and elements in the romantic and melancholic landscaping that began to develop in the 1940s. In particular, in works such as *Port* (1942) by Carlos Prevosti¹⁰⁰ or *Port* (n.d.) by Oscar García Reino,¹⁰¹ the depiction of the human presence through absence or helplessness is observed; by means of especially small figures in

⁸⁷ Carlos Alberto Castellanos, *Drummer*, ca. 1940, oil on cardboard, 65 x 55 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1951.

⁸⁸ Carlos Prevosti, *Conga*, 1943, oil on cardboard, 55 x 46 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1919.

⁸⁹ Adolfo Halty, *Mestizas*, 1948, oil on cardboard, 90 x 90 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2312.

⁹⁰ Felipe Seade, *Carnivals – Pocitos Corso*, 1958, oil on canvas, 140 x 80 cm. Private collection of the artist's heirs, Montevideo.

⁹¹ Manuel Collazo Castro, *Lubolos*, 1943, oil on canvas, 60 x 69.5 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2749.

⁹² Raquel Pereda, *Carlos Alberto Castellanos: imaginación y realidad*, Montevideo 1997, 124.

⁹³ Carlos Prevosti, *Untitled (Figures)*, n.d., ink on paper, 11 x 11 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 5270.

⁹⁴ María Rosa de Ferrari, *Adoration*, ca. 1952, oil on cardboard, 64 x 53 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2518.

⁹⁵ Nelsa Solano Gorga, *Desolation*, ca. 1956, oil on paper, 60 x 48 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2615.

⁹⁶ Fernando Laens, *Exaltation*, 1949, oil, no information. Image available in the catalogue of the XIII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1949, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=015> (accessed June 19, 2021).

⁹⁷ Rodolfo Halty, *Prophet*, 1956, oil on canvas, 118 x 80 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2507.

⁹⁸ Rodolfo Halty, *King David*, 1954, oil on canvas, 88 x 74 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2311.

⁹⁹ Rafael Barradas, *The Adoration of the Magi and the Shepherds*, 1928, oil on canvas, 93 x 116 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1621.

¹⁰⁰ Carlos Prevosti, *Port*, 1942, oil on canvas, 65 x 77 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1905.

¹⁰¹ Oscar García Reino, *Port*, n.d., tempera on paper, 63 x 47 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1035.

settings – with a forced perspective and making use of colour – they are presented at a dense and overwhelming scale. An equally suggestive spirit can be seen in Raul Pavlotzky's *Night Sentinel* (1942),¹⁰² Américo Spósito's *Pruning* (ca. 1943),¹⁰³ César Pesce Castro's *Lavalleja Street* (1944),¹⁰⁴ Francisco Siniscalchi's *Trail* (1944)¹⁰⁵ or Juan Ventayol's *Seascape* (ca. 1949).¹⁰⁶

[31] Therefore, it is not about the sublime landscapes of the first renovating painting or the well-illuminated and unthreatening landscapes of Planism, nor the arcadia landscaping of other painters of the period. They are works that, as William Rey proposes, are framed in a "melancholic background nested in a time of human and philosophical uncertainty".¹⁰⁷ This is, in fact, a landscape that presents a tension between humans and their environment, in which neither seems to definitively colonize the other; this is perceivable in rural landscape works such as *Huts on the Cliff* (n.d.),¹⁰⁸ *Sleepwalkers* (1933)¹⁰⁹ and *Dead Flesh* (1933)¹¹⁰ by José Cuneo, *Dead Flesh* (n.d.) by Carlos Gonzalez¹¹¹ or, later, *Rest* (1974) by Norberto Berdía.¹¹²

Representing the *gaucho*

[32] One of the themes in which the Expressionist contribution is noteworthy is that referring to the representation of the rural world and, with it, the *gaucho*. This is due to the fact that in the early 1950s some works that incorporated this language clearly opposed the dominant thought at the time which – in an attempt to restore a foundational image – attempted to restore a conservative view of the rural world as a territory uncorrupted by the evils of civilization.

[33] At the beginning of the decade, the process of institutionalization of the cultural field had been accentuated through strongly centralized policies and the promotion of a new national culture responding to a hegemonic cultural paradigm determined by the political power. A patrimonial and romantic angle was drawn upon which enabled at the same time the recreation of the historical past and the construction of a patriotic imaginary that would contribute to the unity of the State. In this framework, the work of the nineteenth-century academic painter Juan Manuel Blanes (*Sunrise*,¹¹³ *One of the three chiripás*,¹¹⁴ *Country*

¹⁰² Raul Pavlotzky, *Night sentinel*, 1942, oil on canvas, 80 x 113 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2523.

¹⁰³ Américo Spósito, *Pruning*, ca. 1943, oil on canvas, 74.5 x 64 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2738.

¹⁰⁴ César Pesce Castro, *Lavalleja Street (Fray Bentos)*, 1944, oil. No information. Image available in the catalogue of the VIII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1944, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=007> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹⁰⁵ Francisco Siniscalchi, *Road*, 1944, oil on canvas, 110 x 150 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2372.

¹⁰⁶ Juan Ventayol, *Seascape*, ca. 1949, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 90 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2752.

¹⁰⁷ Rey (2020), 34.

¹⁰⁸ José Cuneo, *Huts on the cliff*, n.d., oil on panel, 146 x 97 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1673.

¹⁰⁹ José Cuneo, *Dormilones*, 1933, watercolor on cardboard, 65 x 50 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1659.

¹¹⁰ José Cuneo, *Dead flesh*, 1933, mixed techniques on paper, 32.5 x 41.5 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 3882.

¹¹¹ Carlos Gonzalez, *Dead flesh*, n.d., woodcut, 40.5 x 29.5 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2001.

¹¹² Norberto Berdía, *Rest*, 1974, watercolor and pencil on paper, 21 x 17 cm. Gallery Portón de San Pedro, Montevideo.

scene¹¹⁵) was revalued, in which the *gaucho* assumes archetypal characteristics in line with the narrative in construction: an exotic, picturesque and civilized creature who eases the sense of guilt of the urban doctors and at the same time makes the national project possible.

*The gaucho "poses" for the painter, exposing his relaxed physical strength, suggesting slow gestures, and highlighting the brilliant subtlety of his "garments". In short, it is a human evocation, frozen in time and, for that reason, with a certain degree of "universality" [...] The gaucho is no longer a heroic prototype of emancipation, but neither is he the socially displaced of that moment: it is a pictorial discourse of traditions, where the character is faithfully represented in its physical-descriptive aspects, but idealized by means of historical asepsis, removed from its real social drama.*¹¹⁶

[34] This worldview was backed by some sectors of the rural bourgeoisie in the face of the crisis of the universe of representations and significations that occurred in the 1930s. Ruralism then became an alternative in the symbolic field against the precedence of the urban and as an affirmation of the rural fate of the country. This interpretation translated into "the conviction that the national existence, *raison d'être* and progress depended on the countryside and its production" and entailed, among other aspects, the recognition of the large estate as a production unit and an idyllic version of the microcosm of the patriarchal farm and its emotional-paternalistic relationship (not merely business related) with its workers.¹¹⁷

[35] In the field of art, this vision took up the values endorsed by nativism in art since the beginning of the century. In the absence of a significant pre-Columbian past, nativism had proposed the construction of a symbolic world based on the local reality, reaffirming its own values without openly colliding with the patterns of the dominant sensitivity. In a way, nativism granted visibility to the different social actors (such as the black soldiers, the mixed race laundresses, the native healers, or the labourers), acknowledging them a place in a mythical, archaizing or utopian past, without actually granting them the possibility of being an active part of the identity of the present or valid elements in a future project.¹¹⁸ As Ivonne Pini clearly explains:

The countryside was seen not as the scenery of the man who inhabits it, of his work, but as a spectacle of unquestionable visual beauty, a landscape for contemplation. The reconstruction of the local image did not involve taking a position on the changes that occurred concerning incipient industrialization and urban

¹¹³ Juan Manuel Blanes, *Sunrise*, ca. 1870, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 cm. Museo de Bellas Artes Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo.

¹¹⁴ Juan Manuel Blanes, *One of the three chiripás*, ca. 1881, oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1094.

¹¹⁵ Juan Manuel Blanes, *Country scene*, ca. 1870, oil on canvas, 80 x 118 cm. Museo de Bellas Artes Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo.

¹¹⁶ Gabriel Peluffo Linari, *Historia de la Pintura Uruguayana – Tomo 1: el imaginario nacional – regional (1830–1930)*, Montevideo 1999 (1), 26.

¹¹⁷ Caetano y Alfaro (1995), 161.

¹¹⁸ Laura Gioscia, ed., *¿Más allá de la tolerancia? Ciudadanía y diversidad en el Uruguay contemporáneo*, Montevideo 2014, 30-31.

*growth. It was an ideal representation that does not show conflicts, that discards everything aggressive or tragic that landscape could possess.*¹¹⁹

[36] Blanes's archetype is precisely the opposite image of the expressionist paintings created from the 1940s. Works like Miguel Angel Pareja's *Wounded Gaucho* (1950) (Fig. 3), for example, establish a clear distance from the vision of a domesticated character and represent the persistence of a more primitive idiosyncrasy or temperament within the longed-for modern nation. This painting depicts a *gaucho* lying on a poncho, notoriously wounded or marked on his abdomen and with a bloody knife in his hand, fallen in a Creole duel, a practice inherited from the colony that, although forbidden, was still a typical way of settling disagreements.



3 Miguel Ángel Pareja, *Wounded Gaucho*, 1950, oil on panel, 73 x 100 cm, private collection (photograph provided by Carly Angenscheidt Lorente)

[37] The Creole duel symbolizes barbarism in terms of what José Pedro Barrán¹²⁰ defined as the disobedience of the "savage" with regard to the hegemonic model and, consequently, the risk of economic recession, political anarchy and, eventually socialism. It is not, therefore, the uncharacterized romantic figure of creole traditionalism, nor is it associated with other paintings of duels or tragic deaths in which the rural world finally yields to modernity. As with works such as Norberto Berdía's *Bad Light* (1948),¹²¹ in which the painter represents the popular myth about the soul in pain, the work of Pareja emphasizes the survival of a primitivism that for many intellectual sectors was considered as belonging to the past.

[38] *Wounded gaucho* is characterized by the use of a clearly Expressionist language, similar to that used by artists such as Gabriele Münter in *Jawlensky and Werefkin* (1908) and *Landscape by the Sea* (1919). In this case, Pareja reduces everything to the essential, by means of simple forms and making an expressive use of line and colours to create a sense of narrative tension, in a composition that evokes works such as *On the stretcher (wounded soldier)* (1914) by Marc Chagall or *Wounded man* (1924) by Otto Dix. However, the

¹¹⁹ Pini (2000), 165.

¹²⁰ Barrán (1991), 19, 23, 27.

¹²¹ Norberto Berdía, *Bad light (Luz mala)*, 1948, lithography, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the XII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1948, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=013> (accessed June 19, 2021).

position of the character, placed diagonally and in the foreground, is also related to works such as Jean-Germain Drouais's *Wounded Roman soldier* (1785) or Gustave Courbet's *The Wounded Man* (1840), which also refers to *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women* (1621) by José de Ribera or *Saint Sebastian* (1836) by Eugène Delacroix, with a highly expressive content and a marked use of light and colour.

[39] Courbet's *The Wounded Man* also represents a duel, with a body lying on the lower edge of the frame, in close proximity to the viewer and in reference to nature. As in the work of Pareja, the character is lying on a cape, with his hands placed next to the weapon used in the confrontation. On the other hand, Drouais' *Roman soldier* has his body in tension and in a defensive attitude, similar to the soldiers of Chagall and Dix, who in their horror and pain look straight at the viewer. They are not martyrs of love or religion, as in the case of Courbet, but men who fight fiercely, until the last moment, claiming what is their own.



4 Luis Mazzezy, *Nocturne in Blue*, 1954, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, Collection of the Uruguayan Legislative Power (photograph provided by Photography Division of the Uruguayan Legislative Power)

[40] Another example that can be mentioned is Luis Mazzezy's *Nocturne in Blue* (1954), (Fig. 4), not only because it incorporates Expressionist plastic elements (such as the monumentality of the shapes, the thick strokes, or the non-use of perspective), but because it problematizes the image of the *gauchos* when representing them immersed in their real social condition. In Mazzezy, the *gauchos* are actually rural wage labourers who carry out apparently rustic and everyday activities: they don't pose for the painter and don't even look at the viewer, they are not relaxed, they don't wear elegant clothes and they are not idealized. Mazzezy's men are working in an inhospitable landscape, where the light, the pose, the *poncho* and the *mate* ceremony transmit the feeling of cold weather, introspection and loneliness. It is the same feeling that can be felt in his works *The Guasquero* (1948),¹²² *Peons* (1945)¹²³ and *Gamblers* (1952)¹²⁴, in which the

¹²² Luis Mazzezy, *The guasquero*, 1948, oil, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the XVIII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1948, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=013> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹²³ Luis Mazzezy, *Peons*, 1945, oil, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the IX National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1945, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=008> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹²⁴ Luis Mazzezy, *Gamblers*, 1952, oil on canvas, 64 x 48 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2522.

figures – who cover the entire surface and are the only ones present – experience moments that are unimportant and rather private, strongly associated with the manual and the licentious.



5 Felipe Seade, *Herding*, 1948, oil on cardboard, 35 x 35 cm, private collection (photograph provided by Carly Angenscheidt Lorente)

[41] An equally critical stance can be seen in the work *Herding* (Fig. 5), by Felipe Seade. This work actually represents the backdrop of a social conflict inherited from the colonial period and connected with the predominance of an agro-exporter model mainly based in extensive stockbreeding. As Jaime Yaffé¹²⁵ explains, the origin of this conflict lies in the diffuse nature that characterized the property of land during many years, owing to either the overlapping titles of diverse origin, or the generalized illegal appropriation of fiscal lands. Besides generating constant conflict among the owners, the occupants and the State, this lack of definition endorsed the coexistence of the property of the land and the cattle that grazed on it, as well as a strongly personal and paternalistic link between the workforce (*peonada*) and the cattle production units (*estancias*).

[42] However, the modernization begun in the late 19th century created a rural order that reaffirmed private property, imposed the wire-fencing of the production units, and severely repressed vagrancy and cattle theft. These measures deprived of land a large number of 'landowners with no title' who – given the typical conditions of extensive stockbreeding – could not be absorbed as wage earning workers nor did they find a place in the urban economy, whose incipient pre-industrial manufacture was saturated by the arrival of European immigrants.

[43] As a result, the rural middle class was drastically reduced; those who did not own land were "downgraded" to the condition of agriculturiers and traditional tasks of herding and separating cattle – which could no longer escape, mix or get lost – became negligible. It was then that trades such as that of the herder – dating back to colonial times – were slowly banished from production and stripped of what constituted their foundation.¹²⁶

[44] In Seade's work, of a dull melancholy, the herdsman carries a few cows while still wearing his typical thick winter *poncho*, which allowed him to withstand the rain and cold during his days and nights in the

¹²⁵ Benjamín Nahún, "La estancia alambrada", in: *Enciclopedia Uruguaya*, 24 (1968), 62-79: 78.

¹²⁶ Nahún (1968), 70.

open weather. It is characterized by a particular Expressionist treatment, which can be linked to some of Georges Rouault's landscapes (*The old wall*, 1930; *Twilight*, 1937; or *Exodus*, 1948), either by the low and plastered palette or by the use of strong black lines. Other local works such as *Herders and Storm* (1950)¹²⁷ by José Cuneo, *Flooded Countryside* (1947)¹²⁸ by César Pesce Castro, *Herder* (n.d.)¹²⁹ by Eduardo Amézaga or *Man and Soil* (1943)¹³⁰ by José Lanzaro also follow this view.

[45] But the persistence of the barbarian and the misery of the *gauchos*, now waged workers in the rural world, is even more intensely denounced in works such as *Shantytown* (1948)¹³¹ by José Lazaro and in other examples closer to a social realism, such as *Farmer's Altarpiece* (1942)¹³² by José María Pagani, *Fertility of the Land* (1944)¹³³ by Berdía, *Truce* (1944)¹³⁴ by Teodoro Bourse and *Peasant* (n.d.)¹³⁵ by Felipe Seade. *Shantytown*, in particular, can be associated with Latin American works of an Expressionist tendency such as *Cheerful Peasants* (1938)¹³⁶ by Cuban Carlos Enriquez or *Peasant Mother* (1929)¹³⁷ by David Alfaro Siqueiros, which display a world that is very distant from nativism, before which it is impossible for the viewer to remain indifferent.

[46] Unlike the displaced European peasants, who found a role in the productive activity of their country, the displaced *gaucho* peons had no chance of insertion into active life and "remained uncultivated, disunited, unaware of their terrible social position, unable to understand it and react".¹³⁸ The *rancheríos* (slums) then emerged as a symbol of the marginalization of a large part of the rural population from the benefits of the modernization of the economic system. And painters used the plastic elements and principles of the international Expressionist movement to approach this local environment, which, in their opinion, deviated drastically from the worldviews proposed by both nativism and the official narratives of national art.

¹²⁷ José Cuneo, *Herders and Storm*, ca. 1950, oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 1677.

¹²⁸ César Pesce Castro, *Flooded Countryside*, 1947, Indian ink, 25.5 x 33 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2381.

¹²⁹ Eduardo Amézaga, *Herder*, n.d., oil on cardboard, 35 x 47.5 cm. Private collection. Image available at MutualArt, <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Tropero/98387890144E2C45> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹³⁰ José Lanzaro, *Man and Soil*, engraving, 1943, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the VII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1943, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=006> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹³¹ José Lanzaro, *Shantytown*, 1948, woodcut, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the XII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1948, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=013> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹³² José María Pagani, *Farmer's Altarpiece*, 1942, oil on canvas. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2691.

¹³³ Norberto Berdía, *Fertility of the Land*, 1944, oil, dimensions not available. Image available in the catalogue of the VIII National Salon of Plastic Arts – 1944, <http://mnav.gub.uy/cms.php?c=007> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹³⁴ Teodoro Bourse, *Truce*, 1944, oil on canvas, 170 x 180 cm. MNAV, Montevideo, online inventory no. 2780.

¹³⁵ Felipe Seade, *Peasant*, oil on canvas, 114 x 85 cm. Private collection. Image available at MutualArt, <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Campesino/7BF3E83016793EAB> (accessed June 19, 2021).

¹³⁶ Carlos Enriquez, *Cheerful Peasants*, 1938, oil on canvas, 122 x 89 cm, National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana.

¹³⁷ David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Peasant Mother*, 1929, oil on sackcloth. 249 x 180 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City.

¹³⁸ Nahún (1968), 79.

Final comments

[47] Despite the fact that Uruguay does not envision itself as an active partner of the international Expressionist movement, between the 1920s and the 1960s a body of local artists incorporated its principles and values to represent the local reality from a position that surpasses both the political and moralizing intention of nativism and a rational and bourgeois sensibility of the beginning of the century. Within the framework of a figurative art trend that sought different approaches to the social and popular subject matter, Expressionism denounced the injustice of war and human suffering on the path to modernity, with a plastic discourse that separated it from local schools; at the same time, it pointed out the persistence of the primitive in the modern-nation project that was being implemented.

[48] These characteristics are especially visible in works that address the rural world, in which painters painstakingly portray the survival of the colonial wild primitivism and the reality of the wage-labourer, in contrast to the narrative and standards of the dominant moral sense. Far from subjecting themselves to the hegemonic cultural paradigm, works such as *Wounded Soldier* by Miguel Ángel Pareja, *Nocturne in Blue* by Luis Mazzei and *Herding* by Felipe Seade are examples of a clear artistic – political and philosophical – viewpoint regarding the tragic and conflictive events in the national landscape as a consequence of the incipient industrialization. The Expressionist *gauchos* are salaried labourers who retain 'wild' habits from the colonial period, whose trades and activities are essentially rustic and in disuse, whose world, sky and open pampas have been reduced to slums in the new modernity.

[49] These works helped to promote a change of moral and plastic values that collaborated with the political and militant art of the following decades. And although until now they had not been studied as a whole, as an attitude within national art, they have undoubtedly contributed to channelling and reformulating different political and social messages. Perhaps it is time to acknowledge them as such, allow for their recognition among equals and include them in the historiography and narratives about national identity.

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