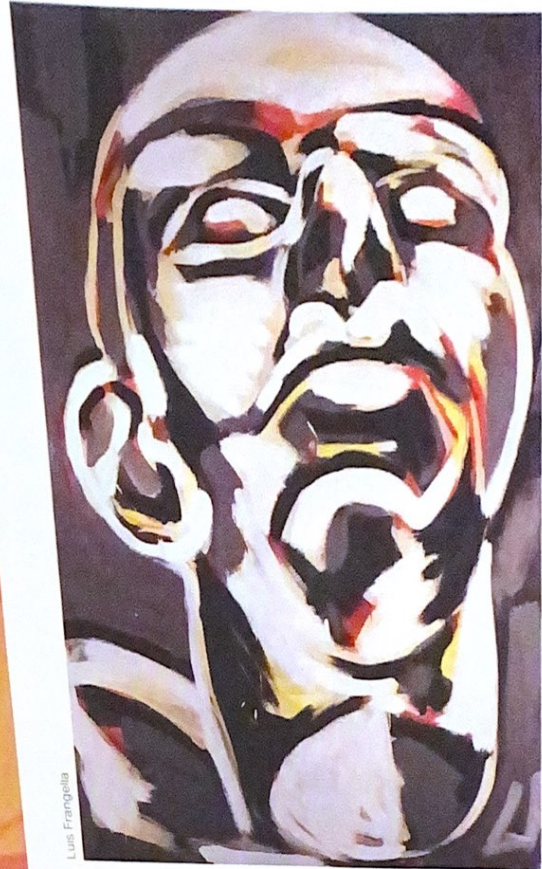


South American Contemporary



Luis Frangella

ART

Five young artists reflect the vanguard in representational painting

by John Stringer

In contrast to the cool, cerebral art of the 1970s, the current decade has witnessed an international resurgence of figurative painting. Much of the character of this new art has come from painters in Italy and Germany whose emphasis on expressionism and private mythology has inspired many.

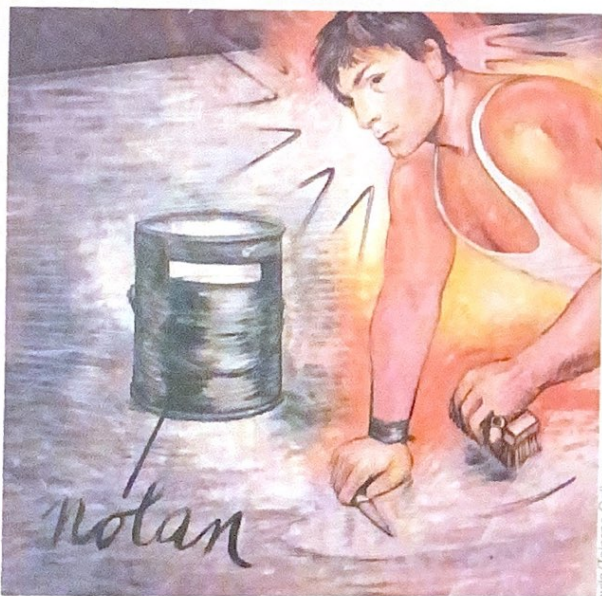
An untitled 1983 painting by Luis Frangella (above); Running, a painting by Dulio Pierri (left), 1981.

Dulio Pierri

**SOUTH AMERICAN
CONTEMPORARY ART**



Spiraling lines and a sense of energy typify Marcia Grostein's canvases.



A detail from Juan Dávila's Gulf, painted in 1983.

For all its "newness" to western Europe, however, figuration has always played a large role in the art of Latin America. Such celebrated contemporary painters as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Roberto Matta, Wifredo Lam, Fernando Botero, Antonio Seguí, and Claudio Bravo have achieved their status at least partially because their insistence on representational modes symbolized to the world not just their regional independence from prevailing international tendencies but their assertion of the individual's fundamental right to cultural freedom.

Currently, there is a fresh spirit in South American painting and sculpture, exemplified by

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SOUTH AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY ART

the work of five young artists whose use of large-scale figuration, though not bound by any rigid ideology, has indeed an affinity with the recent European *transavantguardia*. Though all five of these artists are under the age of 40, they have already evolved highly distinctive individual styles, and are a fair sampling of the variety, quality, and sophistication of painting by young contemporaries from Latin America. An exhibition devoted to most of these artists is planned for the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York City at the end of 1984. And as these artists' reputations are only just becoming established internationally, this is a good time for prospective collectors to examine their work.

MARIA DE LA PAZ JARAMILLO

Born in the regional Colombian city of Manizales, Maria de la Paz Jaramillo had her initial training in Bogotá, before continuing her postgraduate studies in Europe. Now 35 years old, she spends most of her time in Bogotá, although her subjects are inspired by the warmer regions of Colombia, such as the Caribbean coast or the city of Cali (long famous as one of the *salsa* capitals of the world). She recently turned to painting, and the general appearance of her new oils and pastels reflects her extensive experience in the rigorous discipline of printmaking, which has taught her economy in the use of color and contour and accounts for the simplicity of her designs.

By eliminating modeling and emphasizing the makeup and festive attire of nocturnal revelers, de la Paz captures the harsh, shadowless glare and violent chromatic dazzle of the nightclub. Where her early work concentrated on the isolated heads and faces of glamorous young socialites, the new pieces have gained power and conviction by exploring the passionate interaction between partners: embracing, dancing, and kissing in public.

Her remarkable ability to capture the essence of a moment gives her painting something of the instantaneous quality of a snapshot. Gesture is caught at its climax—movement and attitude fully extended—the flashed smile and extrovert gaiety. De la Paz works without the assistance of a camera, and it is principally through her memory—and periodic perusals of fashion maga-

zines—that she succeeds in freezing the behavior of the "beautiful people." The types are real, not invented, although specific celebrities (such as Christie Brinkley posing as one of the *Witty*. *Confident*. *Devastatingly femi-*

Paintings with the quality of a snapshot.

nine models for *The Outspoken Chanel*) are only occasionally identifiable. Titles adopted from popular songs like "Qué dirá el Santo Padre," "No te pongo condiciones," "Toma mis manos," and "Piensa en mí" add special poignance to the chosen images. If, in a sense, this lends her work an element of social commentary, it should not be misinterpreted as judgmental. For her work is a celebration of local, regional tradition and popular culture.

LUIS FRANGELLA

Two young Argentine artists—Luis Frangella and Dulio Pierri—have evolved their styles more recently than de la Paz, whose commitment to figuration predates the current upsurge by more than a decade. Their more personal codes of imagery correspond more demonstrably to the art of the eighties, which is marked by a retreat from collective public issues into caprice.

Although he'd lived in New York for over a decade, Luis Frangella only recently had his first solo exhibition in TriBeCa, a section of Manhattan rich with galleries. The clean design and geometric structure of his earlier three-dimensional constructions clearly reflects Frangella's youthful training as an architect. Structure is still a vital element in his work, but Frangella's new paintings, for all their size and assertive appearance, have a surprisingly traditional motif: the headless, limbless torsos and other body fragments that fill his canvases are more reminiscent of sculptural relics from classical Greco-Roman times than anything from our own era. Broken and truncated details are isolated and presented on a greatly enlarged, monumental scale.

Frangella uses a restricted palette, favoring bi- or tri-chromatic effect in preference to polychrome.

In his New York exhibition, Frangella painted a monumental frieze of male and female torsos on a number of walls, creating a background on which selected canvases were then hung. Free spontaneous drawing and rapid execution give his work a sense of haste and urgency, but the premise for this production is not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, it has not been unusual for Argentine artists to make veiled comments about their country's fractured political status, and it is tempting to identify the broken and scattered bodies as vestiges of violence, a visual metaphor for the crisis that ruptured the unity of the artist's homeland—a monument to the *desaparecidos* (those assumed to have been murdered).

DULIO PIERRI

Mutilations also appear in the works of 29-year-old Dulio Pierri, but in his case they are not the central motif; they simply act as an element in a more complex compositional scheme embracing the city and urban civilization. Streets and domestic interiors provide the setting for strange insectlike creatures with stylized trunks and snouts. Pierri depicts a concave stagelike space where the action takes place—quite unlike Frangella's crowded and advancing convex plane, which pushes enlarged masses out toward the spectator. Despite similarities in their size, Pierri's paintings rely on a wild polychromatic palette and disordered action.

Although the artist does not comment or conjecture about the possible meaning of his work, Pierri's titles themselves frequently refer to violence and conflict: *Squashed Fly*, *Mosquitos' Invasion*, *Mosquito and Foot Fight*, etc. Pierri investigates action rather than repose. But it is his natural flair with a palette of undiluted primary and raw secondary hues that accounts for the outstanding verve of Pierri's painting and distinguishes him from Frangella, whose more pensive work is remarkable principally for its form and structure.

MARCIA GROSTEIN

Following her early studies in São Paulo, the Brazilian artist Marcia Grostein spent two years in London, where
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