

Evil cast in technicolour

By Edward Shaw
For the Herald

Germán Gargano gilds the pill of Latin America's off-again, on-again romance with repression with energetic bright colours and optimistic swathes of thickly textured paint. The title the 43-year-old artist gives his large paintings offer clues to Gargano's intent. *Sanctuary*, *The Flight*, *Repose*, all reflect different situations confronting a victim. Gargano paints with the force and the passion of the victim.

A first flick of the eye over the vibrant surface of a Gargano gives the impression that we are before an upbeat abstract expressionist who twists bits and pieces of his disordered surface into dream-like fragments of a potentially recognizable reality. But there is always a dark corner lurking somewhere in the work.

This emergent black hole forces us to recall that today's technicolor Gargano was — not so long ago — an artist whose basic black paintings were site-specific registers of his days as a prisoner of Argentina's most recent military regime.

Getting beyond the traumas of personal histories — as Gargano has fortunately been able to do — we find a painter who can express himself with passionate brushstrokes and audacious conformations in colour. It takes time to decode his figuration: the operation is reminiscent of watching

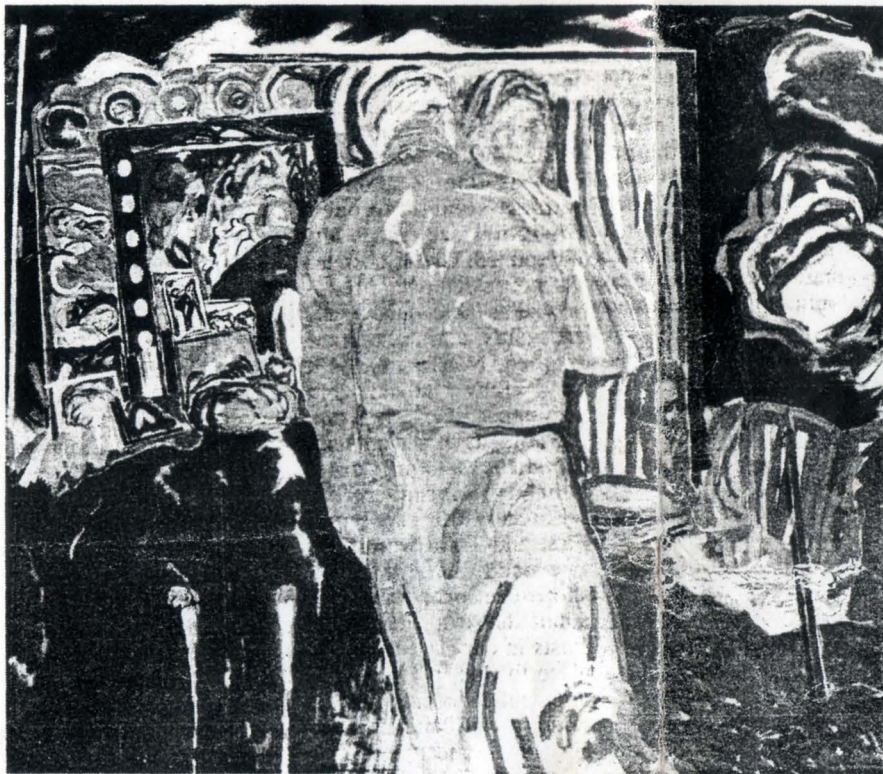
migrating clouds as they flip from form to form.

It is this delicate balance between uninhibited attacks on the canvas — producing chaotic colour combinations — and Gargano's compulsion to draw us into a generalization of his personal drama that makes his painting so compelling.

Chaos is a permanent condition in Argentina — most artists prefer to negate its imperviousness and paint with academically correct precision. Gargano — like the artist who wrote the introduction to the catalog of his recent exhibit at Buenos Aires' Modern Art Museum, Luis Felipe Noé — prefer to revel in the society's most conspicuous attribute — and let chaos work for them in their turbulent creations.

Gargano, the doting father of a four-year-old daughter, is as an individual far removed from the veiled violence of his painting. Some part of his psyche seems to be crying out, seeking retribution, or at least, restitution, through his latest pictures. In his recent show, Gargano's work fell into two categories — paintings which belong to his ongoing body of work reflecting his personal experiences with repression and military rule, and a second series dedicated to the works of great artists: Monet, Courbet and Botticelli.

But as one observer pointed out to him, there is a "black" patch in these paintings too. In *El Sol Ilumina* (1996), his allegorical version of a Botticelli picture,



Intervalo, by Germán Gargano (oil on canvas, 170 cm x 200 cm).

what could be a coffin appears at the lower right. The form of a woman seems to rise from inside it. The lower part of the painting could be a basement packed with bodies — as the artist suggests — or it could be an abstract field of colour. Gargano's poetic framatism takes us beyond Botticellian beauty to pictorial possibilities which are difficult to digest. What gives the painting its capacity to capture our attention is the pure power of the colourful brushstrokes.

La Vida del Pintor (1995-6) is Gargano's version of Courbet's *Alegoría Real-Taller del Artista*. Once again the artist lets his fancy run free, and the surface at times has Matta-like riffs of greens and yellows, incursions into figuration — such as a portrait of his own father — and areas of his habitual roughly-applied strips of blues, reds and yellows. Once again the observer can take it as one gigantic kaleidoscope or spend some time individualizing elements before recomposing them

into a coherent totality.

Bold and blatant, Gargano's work proves that painting, when put at the disposition of universal expression, transports us to a place far beyond the avatars of an anecdotal Argentina. Gargano's painting is about the never-ending, chaotic struggle between good and evil wherever it occurs in our cosmos. These bright colours remind us that evil is not only portrayed in somber shades.

To see Gargano's work, call his studio 342-4177

Around the Galleries

• **Lutz Matschke**, *Natura non facit salus*, photographs. Until January 26 at Recoleta Cultural Centre (Junín 1930).

• **20 Years of Argentine Art**, until December 30 at Colección Alvear de Zurbarán (Av. Alvear 1658, Tel. 811-3004).

• **Molina**, *"The Planets of Oblivion"*, paintings. Until December 31 at Banco Patricios (Callao 312).

• **Isabel de Laborde**, *"Cosmogonic Inscriptions"*, until December 31 at Banco Patricios.

• **Sara Galiasso**, sculptures and installations. Until January 31 at Borges Centre (Viamonte and San Martín). Guided visits to all exhibitions daily at 2pm and 6pm. Information: 319-5359.

• **José Balmes**, paintings. Until January 10 at Borges Cultural Centre.

• **Vitruvius**, paintings and sculptures in Sacred Art (Eduardo Heredero, María Brihuega, Alex Abad). Until January 10 at Borges Cultural Centre.

• **Hermenegildo Sábat**, drawings and paintings. Until January 31 at Borges Cultural Centre.

• **Contemporary Argentine drawing**, until January 31 at Borges Cultural Centre.

• **Jorge Iglesias**, *Invisible Sculptures*. At the Argentine Army's Historical Museum's Exhibitions Center (México 350).

• **Eulalia Gentile Munich**, sculptures. At Dock del Plata (Av. Dávila 380, Dock del Plata, Puerto Madero).