

= Antonio Berni =

Delesio Antonio Berni (Rosario , 14 May 1905 - Buenos Aires , 13 October 1981) was an Argentine figurative artist . He is associated with the movement known as Nuevo Realismo (" New Realism ") , a Latin American extension of social realism . His work , including a series of Juanito Laguna collages depicting poverty and the effects of industrialization in Buenos Aires , has been exhibited around the world .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Berni was born in the city of Rosario on May 14 , 1905 . His mother Margarita Picco was the Argentine daughter of Italians . His father Napoleón , an immigrant tailor from Italy , died in the first World War .

In 1914 Berni became the apprentice of Catalan craftsman N. Bruxada at the Bruxada and Co. stained glass company . He later studied painting at the Rosario Catalá Center where he was described as a child prodigy . In 1920 seventeen of his oil paintings were exhibited at the Salon Mari . On November 4 , 1923 his impressionist landscapes were praised by critics in the daily newspapers La Nación and La Prensa .

= = = Paris = = =

The Jockey Club of Rosario awarded Berni a scholarship to study in Europe in 1925 . He chose to visit Spain , as Spanish painting was in vogue , particularly the art of Joaquín Sorolla , Ignacio Zuloaga , Camarasa Anglada , and Julio Romero de Torres . But after visiting Madrid , Toledo , Segovia , Granada , Córdoba , and Seville he settled in Paris where fellow Argentine artists Horacio Butler , Aquiles Badi , Alfredo Bigatti , Xul Solar , Héctor Basaldua , and Lino Enea Spilimbergo were working . He attended " City of Lights " workshops given by André Lhote and Othon Friesz at Académie de la Grande Chaumière . Berni painted two landscapes of Arcueil , Paisaje de París (Landscape of Paris) , Mantel amarillo (The Yellow Tablecloth) , La casa del crimen (The House of Crime) , Desnudo (Nude) , and Naturaleza muerta con guitarra (Still Life with Guitar) .

He went back to Rosario for a few months but returned to Paris in 1927 with a grant from the Province of Santa Fe . Studying the work of Giorgio de Chirico and René Magritte , Berni became interested in surrealism and called it " a new vision of art and the world , the current that represents an entire youth , their mood , and their internal situation after the end of the World War . A dynamic and truly representative movement . " His late 1920s and early 1930s surrealist works include La Torre Eiffel en la Pampa (The Eiffel Tower in Pampa) , La siesta y su sueño (The Nap and its Dream) , and La muerte acecha en cada esquina (Death Lurks Around Every Corner) .

He also began studying revolutionary politics including the Marxist theory of Henri Lefebvre , who introduced him to the Communist poet Louis Aragon in 1928 . Berni continued corresponding with Aragon after leaving France , later recalling , " It is a pity that I have lost , among the many things I have lost , the letters that I received from Aragon all the way from France ; if I had them today , I think , they would be magnificent documents ; because in that correspondence we discussed topics such as the direct relationship between politics and culture , the responsibilities of the artist and the intellectual society , the problems of culture in colonial countries , the issue of freedom . "

Several groups of Asian minorities lived in Paris and Berni helped distribute Asian newspapers and magazines , to which he contributed illustrations .

= = = Nuevo Realismo = = =

In 1931 Berni returned to Rosario where he briefly lived on a farm and was then hired as a

municipal employee . The Argentina of the 1930s was very different from the Paris of the 1920s . He witnessed labor demonstrations and the miserable effects of unemployment and was shocked by the news of a military coup d'état in Buenos Aires (see Infamous Decade) . Surrealism didn 't convey the frustration or hopelessness of the Argentine people . Berni organized Mutualidad de Estudiantes y Artistas and became a member of the local Communist party .

Berni met Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros who had been painting large @-@ scale political murals on public buildings and was visiting Argentina to give lectures and exhibit his work in an effort to " summon artists to participate in the development of a proletarian art . " In 1933 Berni , Siqueiros , Spilimbergo , Juan Carlos Castagnino and Enrique Lázaro created the mural Ejercicio Plástico (Plastic Exercise) . But ultimately Berni didn 't think the murals could inspire social change and even implied a connection between Siqueiro 's artwork and the privileged classes of Argentina , saying , " Mural painting is only one of the many forms of popular artistic expression ... for his mural painting , Siqueros was obliged to seize on the first board offered to him by the bourgeoisie . "

Instead he began painting realistic images that depicted the struggles and tensions of the Argentine people . His popular Nuevo Realismo paintings include Desocupados (The Unemployed) and Manifestación (Manifestation) . Both were based on photographs Berni had gathered to document , as graphically as possible , the " abysmal conditions of his subjects . " As one critic noted , " the quality of his work resides in the precise balance that he attained between narrative painting with strong social content and aesthetic originality . "

In a 1936 interview Berni said that the decline of art was indicative of the division between the artist and the public and that social realism stimulated a mirror of the surrounding spiritual , social , political , and economic realities .

= = = 1940s and 1950s = = =

In 1941 , at the request of the Comisión Nacional de Cultura , Berni traveled to Bolivia , Ecuador , Peru and Colombia to study pre @-@ Columbian art . His painting Mercado indígena (Indian Market) is based on the photos he took during this trip .

Two years later he was awarded an Honorary Grand Prix at the Salón Nacional and co @-@ founded a mural workshop with fellow artists Spilimbergo , Juan Carlos Castagnino , Demetrio Urruchúa , and Manuel Colmeiro . The artists decorated the dome of the Galerías Pacifico .

The 1940s saw various revolutions and coups d'état in Latin America including the ousting of Argentine President Ramón Castillo in 1943 . Berni responded with more political paintings including Masacre (Massacre) and El Obrero Muerto (The Dead Worker) .

From 1951 to 1953 Berni lived in Santiago del Estero , a province in northwestern Argentina . The province was suffering massive ecological damage including the exploitation of quebracho trees . While in Santiago del Estero he painted the series " Motivos santiagueños " and " Chaco , " which were later exhibited in Paris , Berlin , Warsaw , Bucharest and Moscow .

In the 1950s he returned to expressionism with works like Los hacheros (Axemen) and La comida (Food) , and began a series of suburban landscapes including Villa Piolín (Villa Tweety) , La casa del sastre (House of Taylor) , La iglesia (The Church) , El tanque blanco (White Tank) , La calle (Street) , La res (The Answer) , Carnicería (Carnage) , La luna y su eco (The Moon and its Echo) , and Mañana helada en el páramo desierto (Morning Frost on the Moor) . He also painted Negro y blanco (Black and White) , Utensilios de cocina sobre un muro celeste (Cookware on a Blue Wall) , and El caballito (The Pony) .

= = = Juanito Laguna = = =

Berni 's post @-@ 1950s work can be viewed as " a synthesis of Pop Art and Social realism . " In 1958 he began collecting and collaging discarded material to create a series of works featuring a character named Juanito Laguna . The series became a social narrative on industrialization and poverty and pointed out the extreme disparities existing between the wealthy Argentine aristocracy and the " Juanitos ? of the slums .

As he explained in a 1967 Le Monde interview , " One cold , cloudy night , while passing through the miserable city of Juanito , a radical change in my vision of reality and its interpretation occurred ... I had just discovered , in the unpaved streets and on the waste ground , scattered discarded materials , which made up the authentic surroundings of Juanito Laguna - old wood , empty bottles , iron , cardboard boxes , metal sheets etc . , which were the materials used for constructing shacks in towns such as this , sunk in poverty . "

Latin American art expert Mari Carmen Ramirez has described the Juanito works as an attempt to " seek out and record the typical living truth of underdeveloped countries and to bear witness to the terrible fruits of neocolonialism , with its resulting poverty and economic backwardness and their effect on populations driven by a fierce desire for progress , jobs , and the inclination to fight . "

Notable Juanito works include Retrato de Juanito Laguna (Portrait of Juanito Laguna) , El mundo prometido a Juanito (The World Promised to Juanito) , and Juanito va a la ciudad (Juanito Goes to the City) . Art featuring Juanito (and Ramona Montiel , a similar female character) won Berni the Grand Prix for Printmaking at the Venice Biennale in 1962 .

In 1965 a retrospective of Berni 's work was organized at the Instituto Di Tella , including the collage Monsters . Versions of the exhibit were shown in the United States , Argentina , and several Latin American countries . Compositions such as Ramona en la caverna (Ramona in the Cavern) , El mundo de Ramona (Ramona 's World) , and La masacre de los inocentes (Massacre of the Innocent) were becoming more complex . The latter was exhibited in 1971 at the Paris Museum of Modern Art . By the late 1970s Berni 's Juanito and Ramona oil paintings had evolved into three @-@ dimensional altar pieces .

= = = Later years and death = = =

After a March 1976 coup Berni moved to New York City where he continued painting , engraving , collaging , and exhibiting . New York struck him as luxurious , consumerist , materially wealthy , and spiritually poor . He conveyed these observations in subsequent work with a touch of social irony . His New York paintings display a great protagonism of color and include Aeropuerto (Airport) , Los Hippias , Calles de Nueva York (Streets of New York) , Almuerzo (Lunch) , Chelsea Hotel , and Promesa de castidad (Promise of Chastity) . He also produced several decorative panels , scenographic sketches , illustrations , and collaborations for books .

Berni 's work gradually became more spiritual and reflective . In 1980 he completed the paintings Apocalipsis (Apocalypse) and La crucifixion (The Crucifixion) for the Chapel of San Luis Gonzaga in Las Heras , where they were installed the following year .

Antonio Berni died on October 13 , 1981 in Buenos Aires where he had been working on a Martin Fierro monument . The monument was inaugurated in San Martin on November 17 of the same year . In an interview shortly before his death he said , " Art is a response to life . To be an artist is to undertake a risky way to live , to adopt one of the greatest forms of liberty , to make no compromise . Painting is a form of love , of transmitting the years in art . "

= = Legacy = =

Since the late 1960s various Argentine musicians have written and recorded Juanito Laguna songs . Mercedes Sosa recorded the songs Juanito Laguna remonta un barrilete (on her 1967 album Para cantarle a mi gente) and La navidad de Juanito Laguna (on her 1970 album Navidad con Mercedes Sosa) . In 2005 a compilation CD commemorating Berni 's 100th birthday included songs by César Isella , Marcelo San Juan , Dúo Salteño , Eduardo Falú , and Las Voces Blancas , as well as two short recordings of Berni speaking in interviews .

Several Argentine government organizations also celebrated Berni 's centennial in 2005 , including the Ministerio de Educación , Ciencia y Tecnología de la Nación , and Secretaría de Turismo de la Nación . Berni 's daughter Lily curated an art show entitled Un cuadro para Juanito , 40 años después (A painting for Juanito , 40 years later) . Through the organization De Todos Para Todos (By All For All) children across Argentina studied Berni 's art then created their own using his collage

techniques .

In July 2008 thieves disguised as police officers stole fifteen Berni paintings that were being transported from a suburb to the Bellas Artes National Museum . Culture Secretary Jose Nun described the paintings as being " of great national value " and described the robbery as " an enormous loss to Argentine culture . "