

# PAUL YGARTUA

## Primordial Chaos

# Paul Ygartua

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Nel 2001 le Nazioni Unite hanno riconosciuto la Biennale di Firenze come partner ufficiale nel loro programma "Dialogo fra le Civiltà". Programma egregiamente svolto dalla Biennale che ha visto la partecipazione crescente di artisti provenienti da ogni parte del mondo. Diversi per tradizioni etniche, linguistiche e religiose, gli artisti hanno trovato attraverso l'arte, un linguaggio comune, che ha permesso di comunicare i loro valori culturali in perfetta assonanza al pensiero espresso da Kofi Annan:

*"Io credo che il dialogo sia un'opportunità per le persone provenienti da diverse culture e tradizioni, di conoscersi meglio tra di loro, sia che vivano agli estremi opposti del mondo sia che vivano nella stessa strada. Gli Artisti hanno un ruolo speciale da svolgere nella lotta per la pace. Gli artisti parlano non solo alla gente ma anche per la gente. L'arte è un' arma contro l'ignoranza e l'odio ed è anche il rappresentante della coscienza umana. L'arte apre nuove porte per imparare e capire, per raggiungere la pace fra popolazioni e nazioni."*

Questa preziosa Collana degli Artisti della Biennale, attraverso il nobile linguaggio dell'Arte, rappresenta un nuovo importante capitolo della storia dell'Arte Contemporanea.

In 2001 the United Nations recognized the Florence Biennial as an official partner in their program "Dialogue Between Civilizations" - a program well executed by the Biennial, which has seen an increasing number of participants from all parts of the world; with different ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions, that have found through art a common language with which to communicate their cultural values in perfect harmony with Kofi Annan's statement:

*"I believe that dialogue is an opportunity for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better, whether they live at opposite ends of the world or in the same street. Artists have a special role to play in the struggle for peace. Artists speak not only to people but for people. Art is a weapon against ignorance and hatred and a representative of human conscience. Art opens new doors for learning, understanding, and peace among people and nations."*

Through art language, the Biennale Artists' series, represent a new important chapter on Contemporary Art History.

G A R T U A



# PRIMORDIAL CHAOS

## CAOS PRIMORDIALE

Flora Rovigo  
(Storica dell'Arte / Art Historian)

Interpretare razionalmente un'opera d'arte astratta o cercare solamente con il linguaggio verbale di introdurre qualcuno alla sua percezione può divenire un viaggio senza approdo. L'osservatore, spinto ad una conoscenza puramente estetica e non sensoriale, rischia di naufragare nel magma informale, può perdersi nelle paludi dei fraintendimenti e delle ambiguità.

Capire i meccanismi creativi che portano al concepimento artistico, stabilire come l'artista ha trasformato l'intuizione in materia pittorica e leggerne il risultato è sempre difficile.

Anche le opere di Paul Ygartua si prestano alle medesime indagini poiché vi riscontriamo immagini di una realtà apparentemente trasfigurata, sottratta ad ogni riferimento formale e, per questo, ad una lettura superficiale e impenetrabile.

Ad attrarci è l'esasperato cromatismo che invade la tela fino a dominarla totalmente, siamo rapiti dal caos delle tinte che si giustappongono l'una sull'altra per mezzo di rapide pennellate o con tratti più ampi apposti con la spatola.

Ma se per lo spettatore il colore funziona da catalizzatore, per Ygartua la cromia e la sua applicazione favorisce l'afflusso di tendenze istintive. Le composizioni dell'artista inglese non sono traduzioni artistiche di un mondo concreto, ma interpretazioni della parte più impulsiva, passionale ed energetica dell'universo. Secondo come tale moto energetico arriva al pittore, risvegliandone i sensi, esso si tramuta in orchestrazione tonale, in un coro a più voci o in un concerto con pochi elementi.

Il pittore non registra dati, sebbene parta da una realtà più volte osservata e anche riprodotta in passato in modo oggettivo; infatti ad interessarlo adesso è la forza emotiva trasmessa dal vero. Niente deve più omologarsi al reale da cui tutto ha avuto origine: la combinazione creativa si attiene unicamente agli stati d'animo suscitati.

La sensibilità con cui Ygartua percepisce le cose fa sì che non solo abbia la normale capacità di individuarne le proprietà strutturali generali, ma anche di scoprirne le qualità dinamiche: l'artista riesce a rappresentare le forme attraverso il gioco di forze ed energie che si scate-

Rationally interpreting a work of abstract art or even just using verbal language to try and introduce someone to its perception can become an endless journey. The spectator, forced into a purely aesthetic, non-sensorial knowledge, risks floundering in informal magma, getting lost in swamps of misunderstanding and ambiguity.

Understanding the creative mechanisms which lead to artistic conception, establishing how the artist has transformed intuition into pictorial material and reading the result is always difficult.

Paul Ygartua's works are ideal for this kind of analysis, because we find images of an apparently transfigured reality, subtracted from every formal reference and, consequently, from a superficial and impenetrable reading. What attracts us is the exasperated chromatism, which invades the canvas until it dominates it completely. We are enraptured by the chaos of the colours that juxtapose thanks to quick brushstrokes or broader touches, created using a spatula.

But while the spectator sees color as a catalyst, for Ygartua chromatics and the application of color encourage the flow of instinctive trends. The British artist's compositions aren't artistic translations of a solid world, but interpretations of the more impulsive, passionate and energetic part of the universe. Depending on how this energetic motion reaches the painter, reawakening his senses, it is changed into tonal orchestration, into a choir made up of numerous voices or into a concert with a reduced number of elements.

The painter doesn't record data, although he starts from a reality observed on several occasions and also reproduced in an objective way in the past; what he's interested in now is the emotional strength transmitted by what is real. Nothing must conform to the real element from which it originated: the creative combination adheres exclusively to the moods aroused.

The sensitivity with which Ygartua perceives things means that not only does he have the usual capacity to identify general structural properties, but also to discover their dynamic qualities: the artist succeeds

nano attraverso reciproche interazioni, riuscendo così a riprodurre il valore espressivo degli oggetti. L'arte di Ygartua è un mezzo per capire la potenza dei movimenti vitali del mondo, un modo per rendersi conto del suo valore e del suo potere; le sue creazioni offrono allo spettatore l'opportunità di comprendere le relazioni esistenti tra i vari elementi che compongono la realtà.

In opere come "*Dark Interlude*", "*Infinity*" o "*Kaleidoscope*" tutte le vibrazioni ed i moti che animano il reale prendono vita sotto forma di un agglomerato di forme e colori che si sommano e si susseguono. Tutto appare frammentato, su un fondo monocromatico, o eseguito con pochi toni, si aggiungono schegge di consistenza e piccoli piani di una oggettività segmentata.

L'insieme delle parti esplode in un unico punto: è come se su un piano calmo e statico si fosse creata una fenditura (appunto dal greco *chaos*) e fosse deflagrata una massa organica e pulsante. Questo insieme policromatico non è maturato tramite pensieri razionali, ma su impressioni, commozioni ed euforie. Il pittore ricrea così il tracciato emotivo che le visioni esterne gli hanno procurato. Le sue opere hanno un livello concettuale molto alto scaturito interamente dall'osservazione intensa di un mondo più sensoriale che materiale.

I componenti pittorici sono elaborati in modo rapido, in un crescendo di evoluzioni tonali e gestuali. Se le quinte cromatiche ricreano un andamento lento e sintetico, apparentemente bidimensionale, le orchestrazioni espressive in primo piano riescono a trasmettere movimento a tutta la struttura visiva, donando corpo e vita all'opera. L'artista non si è limitato ad individuare e selezionare certe caratteristiche del mondo sensibile ma ha scelto di ricrearne le dinamiche espressive.

All'interno di queste *dichiarazioni* visive, dove l'opera è un vero e proprio pensiero emotivo ed un inno allo scorrere dell'energia vitale, si ritrovano anche riferimenti formali presenti più per il loro significato metaforico che per il loro valore oggettivo.

in representing shapes through a game of strengths and energies that are released through reciprocal interactions, thus managing to reproduce the expressive value of objects. Ygartua's art is a means of understanding the power of the vital movements of the world, a way of realizing its value and its power; his creations offer spectators the opportunity to comprehend the relationships that exist between the various elements that make up reality.

In works like "*Dark Interlude*", "*Infinity*" or "*Kaleidoscope*" all the vibrations and movements that animate reality come to life in the form of agglomerates of shapes and colours which accumulate and pursue each other in sequence. Everything seems to be fragmented, against a monochrome background, or created with just a few shades, with the addition of splinters of consistency and small planes of segmented objectivity.

The combination of parts explodes in a single point: it's as though a calm and static surface has split open (from the Greek *chaos*) and a throbbing organic mass has deflagrated. This polychromatic composition has not matured through rational thoughts, but via impressions, commotions and euphoric excitements. In this way the painter recreates the emotional track generated by external visions. His works have a very high conceptual level, triggered entirely by the intense observation of a world which is more sensorial than material.

The pictorial components are elaborated quickly, in a crescendo of tonal and gestural evolutions. If the colored scenes recreate a slow, synthetic and apparently two-dimensional progress, the expressive orchestrations in the foreground succeed in transmitting movement to the whole visual structure, conveying body and life to the work. The artist hasn't simply identified and selected certain features of the sensitive world, but has chosen to recreate its expressive dynamics.

Inside these visual *statements*, where the work is an authentic emotional thought and a tribute to the flow of vital energy, one also finds formal references, included largely for their metaphoric significance rather than for their objective value.



**Abduction**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection

Spesso Ygartua cita visivamente gli scacchi: lo fa esplicitamente riproducendo vari pezzi del gioco posizionati sulle caselle o dipingendo la scacchiera come una sorta di pavimentazione che ci conduce all'interno del *disordine* pittorico ("Checkmate" e "Continuum" ne sono degli esempi). Quella descritta non è una partita dettata da regole logico-matematiche, sembra più intento a parlarci dell'eterna lotta tra principi originari e contrari, dell'infinito divenire dell'universo come della vita stessa.

Il pittore ci parla di quella dialettica del gioco che, uscendo fuori dai confini della scacchiera, si estende al mondo intero: i pedoni che vengono spostati dai giocatori altro non sono che degli uomini, la cui vita è mossa da un volere superiore. Il bianco e nero dei riquadri ci spingono verso l'ignoto, in quella lucida confusione gestuale e cromatica, dove realtà e gioco si fondono in un'imprecisata dilatazione di spazio e tempo: il mondo reale si dissolve in una medesima massa inorganica per confluire in nuo-

Ygartua often visually cites the chess game.

He does this either by laying out the actual chess figures on site or by painting the chessboard as a sort of ground that leads the viewer inside the pictorial chaos (as seen *Checkmate*" and "Continuum"). Such game is not described by logical or mathematical rules, but intended as a speech about the eternal struggle between binary opposites, about the infinite becoming of the universe and as life it self.

The painter tells us about those dialectics of the game which, breaking free from the confines of the chessboard, extend to the whole world: the pawns moved by the players are simply men, whose lives are piloted by a higher will. The black and white of the checks push us towards the unknown, in that lucid gestural and chromatic confusion, where reality and game merge into an unspecified dilation of space and time: the real world dissolves into one inorganic mass, to flow into new existences.



**Material Equivalence,**  
acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120,  
private collection

ve esistenze.

Anche nell'esaltazione del corpo femminile, come in *"Femmes du Carnaval"* e *"Spanish Nuns"*, Ygar-tua loda la vita e la sua origine. Volti primitivi, dai tratti sintetici ed intensi, che riecheggiano maschere africane o i visi egizi, si uniscono a corpi voluttuosi e rigogliosi tipici di figure divine inneggianti la fertilità e la procreazione. Le figure muliebri, ritratte con poche linee nere dall'andamento sinuoso ma essenziale, emergono dal disordine estetico sottostante come se la vita, nonostante tutto, possa risorgere infinitamente.

L'artista, abbandonando l'organizzazione convenzionale e comunicando tramite l'informale, esprime anche la volontà di tornare al materiale grezzo e allo stato primordiale delle cose. Ma il caos emozionale a cui fa riferimento può rappresentare anche la dimensione cosmica, psicologica e artistica che precede ogni atto creativo. Il pittore traduce questo stato di subbuglio arcaico sulle

Also in the exultation of the female form, as in *"Femmes du Carnaval"* and *"Spanish Nuns"*, Ygar-tua praises life and its origin. Primitive faces, with synthetic, intense features, reminiscent of African masks or Egyptian faces, join with voluptuous and flourishing bodies typical of divine figures paying tribute to fertility and procreation. The womanly figures, portrayed with a few sinuous but basic black lines, emerge from the aesthetic disorder beneath, as if life, despite everything, can be resurrected infinitely.

The artist, having abandoned conventional organization and having chose to communicate in informal terms, also expresses the desire to return to the raw materials, to the primordial state of things. But the emotional chaos to which it refers can also represent the cosmic, psychological and artistic dimension, which precedes every creative deed. The painter translates this state of archaic upset on his canvases because he is aware that



**Continuum,**  
acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120,  
private collection

sue tele poiché è consapevole che questa condizione funge da matrice originaria: dalla sua forza deriva il creato. In questo caos tutti gli elementi si ritrovano uniti prima di sottostare ad un'unica forza moderatrice.

Ogni artista, come un bravo alchimista, ha l'opportunità di ricondurre a perfezione questa massa informe ma può, come Ygartua, studiarne prima i processi evolutivi descrivendone le potenzialità ed il vigore sprigionati prima della manifestazione del nuovo. Le creazioni dell'artista ci conducono in un viaggio iniziatico, corrispondono alla metafora di un cammino interiore che porta ad una maggiore conoscenza di ciò che muove la parte più profonda delle coscienze: il caos primordiale è da attraversare come una sorta di bagno rigenerante. Dopo lo scompiglio la rinascita, dopo la tempesta la quiete, dopo le certezze del finito l'estasi dell'infinito.

**Northern Lights,**  
acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120,  
private collection

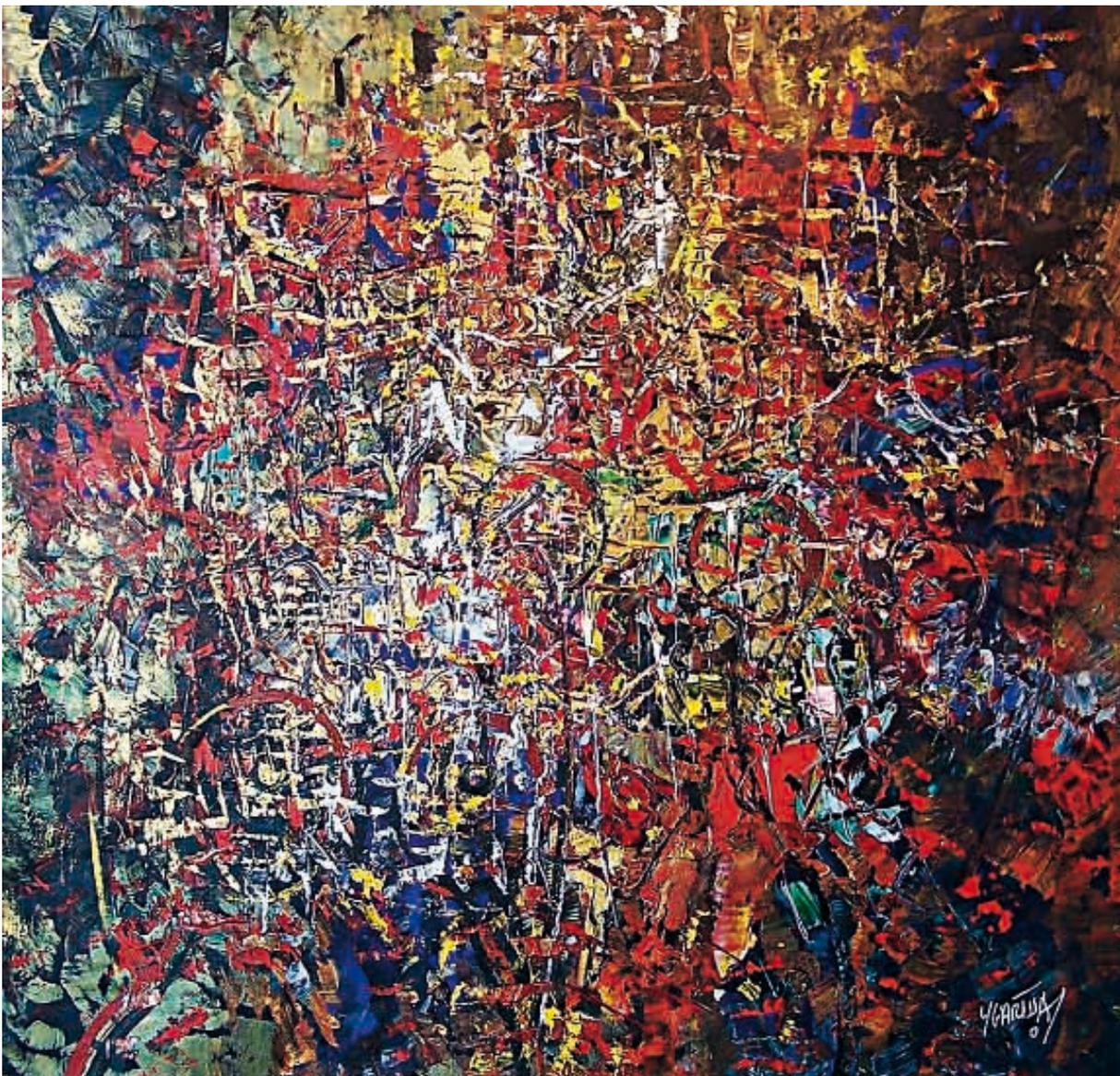
this condition acts as an original matrix: its strength generates creation. In this chaos, all the elements are joined before submitting to a single moderating force. Every artist, like a skilled alchemist, has the opportunity to retrace this shapeless mass to perfection but can, like Ygartua, first study the evolutionary processes, describing their potential and the vigor released before anything new is manifested. The artist's creations take us on an initiatory trip, they correspond to the metaphor of an inner journey which leads to a greater awareness of what moves the deepest area of consciences: primordial chaos must be crossed like a sort of regenerating bath. Breakdown followed by rebirth, a storm followed by calm, the certainties of the finite followed by the ecstasies of the infinite.





PORTRAIT OF A RUG MERCHANT  
July 2, 2008

Michael Silverbrooke  
(Collector)



**Compulsion,**  
acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120,  
private collection

When Paul Ygartua created his first abstract expressionist work I wasn't there, but I was there on February 21, 2005. That is the date he created the first of an exciting new series of abstract expressionist paintings.

He creates ( using knife and brush) these compelling images dominated by rich impasto, detailed with fine lines and punctuated with geometric shapes. On that February day I was in his studio when he put a 30" X24" blank canvas on the easel. I watched at his side until the work was complete, signed, titled, dated and removed from the easel. I should have been taking photos or notes, the process of watching a genius at work is fascinating and should be documented.

Often when one looks at an abstract expressionist painting it is tempting to think that all the visual excitement, is the result of a haphazard process, of

course its not the case; at least with Paul.

As he worked, I asked about the colours, the lines, the knife manipulations, the shapes.

Paul explained them all. He worked at the canvas like a mathematician might work on a formula.

Everything had a purpose, the equation would be resolved. He was going into, what seemed to me, uncharted territory. I had never seen him create such a work. As usual, his confidence never faltered.

I suppose it can be, or look, easy if you have his imagination combined with his skill as a colourist and draughtsman. In about one hour the sublime solution was found, the story complete.

The result, a compelling, graceful and expressive work. The title, "Portrait of a Rug Merchant" to humour and acknowledge the sole spectator of a one man show performed by a genius.



**Checkmate**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**The Game II**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Infinity**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Inverted Spectrum**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection

Composition, color, perspective, form.

Paul Ygartua told me those were the four things he looked for when creating or evaluating art.

This came in response to a question of mine about a new painting by another artist in my collection. He then went on to give a detailed academic like analysis of the canvas.

Paul is not a teacher: he has been a full time painter for the last forty years.

He has never taken students, but he can talk academic art with ease and insight.

He is a genius. These are a few of my perspectives of that genius.

Paul paints 8 to 10 hours every day. If people are watching in a public place; like his gallery, that's fine with him. He is supremely confident and goes about the business of creation.

If someone interrupts to ask a question he is always poised, with a friendly insightful response; but he keeps painting. Ten-hour stretches are not uncommon.

I remember reading about a famous Canadian artist who couldn't take the pressure of having to produce 18 paintings a year for his gallery; Paul is prolific and creates new works daily.

He says a good artist should be able to paint fast. The great ones do.

Gainsborough, like Paul, rarely went over the same brush stroke twice.

At an Ygartua show, about 2 years ago, I was approached by an architect who commented that the artist was a genius.

I asked how so? He said, "look at all these paintings (there were dozens) there is not one mistake, everyone is perfectly balanced, colored and in perspective."

He proceeded to go through the collection showing examples, adding "you can't look at one picture and say that color is wrong or that line is off." He was right.

Ygartua is a genius.

Paul is best known to the general public in our part of the world as a muralist. Paintings 20 feet by 50 feet on

the sides of public buildings. He does them free hand! No projectors, no graph grids, just give him a high lifter, a brush and paint. The ability to freely compose on such a large scale is amazing. Those who wonder what it would have been like to watch Michelangelo at work have their chance; he should sell tickets.

About 4 years ago, I was showing Paul a small Gainsborough portrait I'd bought at auction.

I commented "why would a great artist take all the time it would take to paint such a small picture?" Paul said "Gainsborough was a good artist it probably took him only 30 minutes."

When I questioned that, he said "give me the painting, I'll make you a copy."

We were having dinner at the Ygartua's the next night. I fully expected Paul to beg off the project.

After all, I had never seen him paint in anything like the Gainsborough style.

When we arrived he presented me with a copy, varnished and aged to look like the original.

I asked "how long did it take?" Joanne said "about half an hour." Paul corrected her, saying it was more like 2 hours, because he had to fashion a one bristle brush, age the painting, and apply varnish.

I put the painting in a frame the next day and took it back to the auction house to show them the copy.

Before I could explain, the manager asked why I had changed the 18th century frame. Paul can do anything.

A greater example of his talent was when a mutual friend, who is a collector of Napoleonic memorabilia, wanted a 3'x6' painting of the Scots Greys charge at Waterloo (a La Elizabeth Butler).

I showed the concept to a few artist friends who balked at the enormous project, quoting weeks or months for completion.

My friend approached Paul on Saturday while having dinner at my home, about doing the job.

He said he would fit it in the following week, because it looked like an interesting challenge, and would have it delivered on Thursday. On Thursday morning (Paul seldom misses deadlines) we had the unveiling.



**Kaleidoscope**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection

Seventeen horses and riders coming right at you. Every hoof, torso, leg and arm perfectly foreshortened. A tour de force. I've heard whole essays have been written about Rembrandt's foreshortening of the watch captain's outstretched arm in the "Night Watch". One day, essays may be written about Ygartua's "Scots Greys".

I've often compared the experience of watching Paul work, and discussing it with him while he works, to being in Hemingway's studio or at Beethoven's piano while they composed, freely asking questions

about each line and the creative process.

It is a rare occurrence to find an artist/creator of Paul's caliber, with whom you can do that.

Knowing Paul Ygartua has been one of the most fascinating experiences of my life.

I hope this book will allow more art lovers to know one of the great masters of today.



**Dramatic Encounter**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**The New World**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Evolving Universe**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**The Awakening**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection

MARKUS

Ygartua is a painter most often translating the bold strokes of his life into the more subtle finer strokes of his work.

His bold strokes and color show his extraordinary ability and confidence to work in any medium, any style.

(William Davey Canadian Federation of Artists)

### **PAUL YGARTUA REVEALS THE POWER OF COLOR IN NEW YORK**

Paul Ygartua's abstract and impressionist paintings exhibited with great success at the Montserrat Gallery in New York, unequivocally revealed the power of color and form in the service of free thought, leaving a trail of emotion in spectators, satisfying their thirst for contemporary expression and bringing the message of what humankind can accomplish with its futuristic thoughts and ideas. With his broad experience accumulated through extensive international travel, Paul Ygartua, with joy and untiring enthusiasm, has brought his work to the main art galleries of the great European, Asian and Latin American capitals.

In his interview he revealed the secret of his creativity, observing that "I haven't changed a bit, I continue living with the same passion and the same energy as the artist who has just begun and has to place himself at the starting point in order to better see the horizon that he has to reach; for this reason, in each work that I am going to begin, I put all my passion, feelings and will, in order to conceive something new and create with my brushes a fantasy capable of stirring the imagination. Critics of Paul Ygartua's work affirm that these are faithful reflections of his impulsive personality, transmitting his dynamism, speed, and originality.

(Luis Rodriguez Aranguren, New York)  
New York, Soho - Montserrat Gallery

Paul Ygartua, son of a Basque father, was born in Bebington, near Liverpool, in 1945, and immigrated to Canada when he was twenty.

At that time he was a jewelry designer, until two years later when he was tempted to try painting.

His design background gave him skills, technique and even discipline, but he didn't truly find his path as a painter, it seems, until he discovered the North American photographer Edward Curtis.

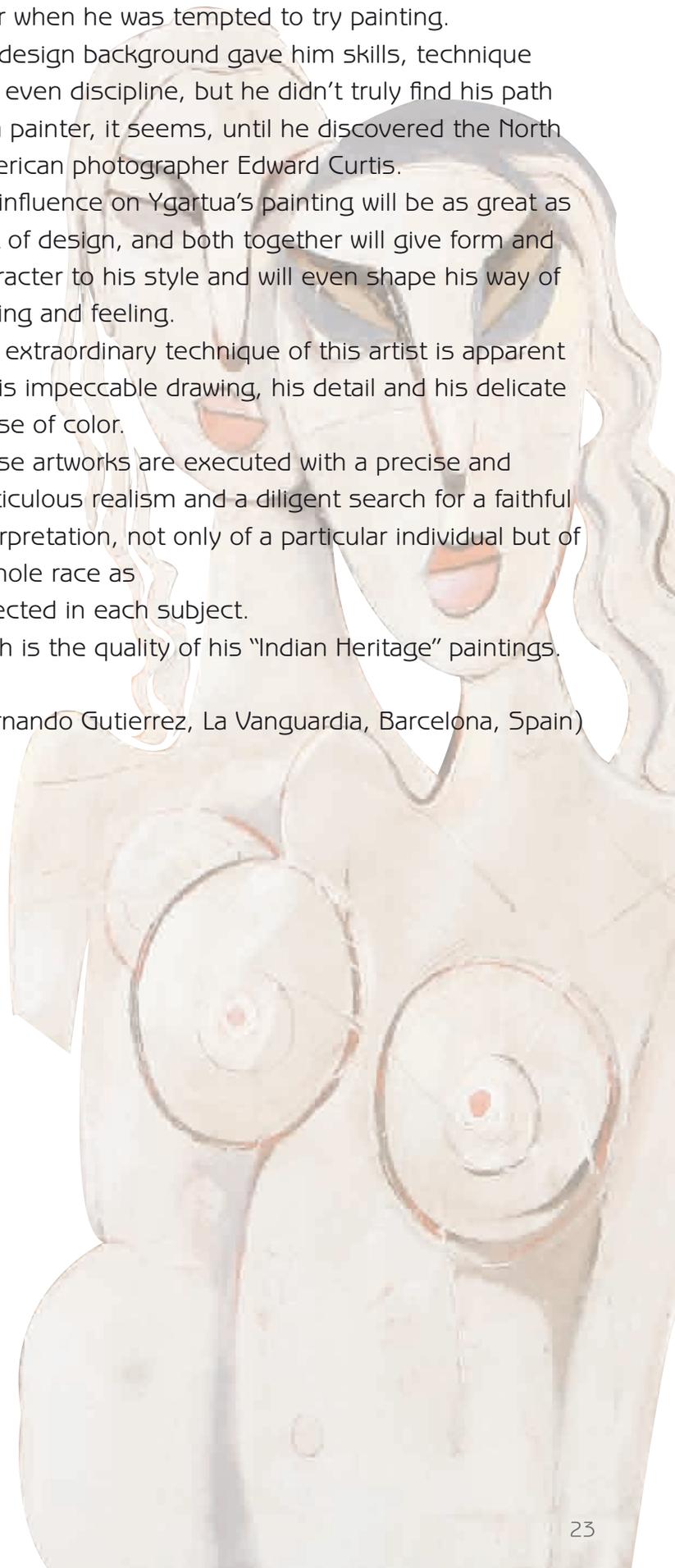
His influence on Ygartua's painting will be as great as that of design, and both together will give form and character to his style and will even shape his way of seeing and feeling.

The extraordinary technique of this artist is apparent in his impeccable drawing, his detail and his delicate sense of color.

These artworks are executed with a precise and meticulous realism and a diligent search for a faithful interpretation, not only of a particular individual but of a whole race as reflected in each subject.

Such is the quality of his "Indian Heritage" paintings.

(Fernando Gutierrez, La Vanguardia, Barcelona, Spain)





**Femmes Du Carnaval**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Double Effect**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Asymmetric**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Man + Woman**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Primitive Compulsion**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Inclination**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Celestial Girls of the Night**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 122 x 112, private collection



**Spanish Nuns**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**The Procession,**  
acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 200  
private collection





**La Maitresse**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**The Game III**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Exposure**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Dark Interlude**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Contiguous Blue**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Deep Perception**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection



**Without Boundaries**, acrylic on canvas, cm. 120 x 120, private collection