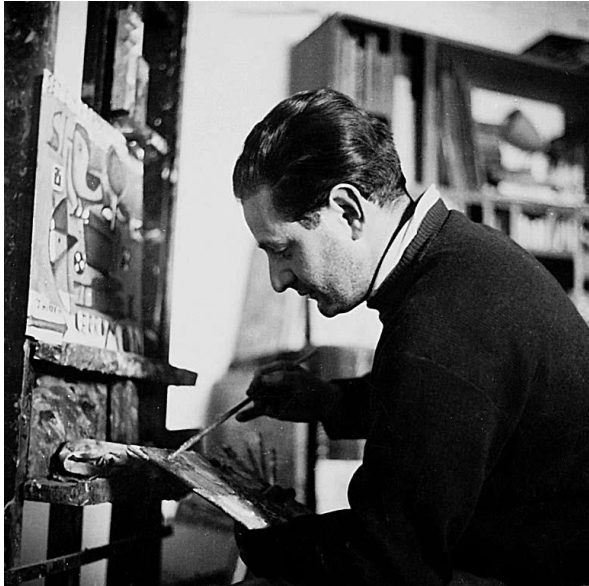


José Gurvich

Lithuania, 1927 - New York City, 1974



1927

Born January 5th of Jaie Galperas, and the barber Jacob Gurvich in Jieznas, a Lithuanian village in the Trakai district west of the capital Vilnius, an important Jewish cultural center near the border to Belorussia. Years before, Jacob had been drafted by the Russian Red Army and was seriously wounded during his service. Deployed on a campaign near the Lithuanian frontier, he managed to slip through the border and return home. He married and when his children were born vowed to leave for a more stable place to raise his family.

1928

José Gurvich's sister Miriam was born.

1932

Jacob immigrated to Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1931, and had his family joined him at the end of 1932. (Over a period of about 50 years, from 1886 to 1940, about 25% of Lithuanians sought refuge from Czarist and Soviet rule by emigrating to the US, Canada, Latin America and Australia.) The Gurvich family settled in the Barrio Sur, where a large contingent of working class Jews lived. They spoke Lithuanian Yiddish at home. José was sent to the neighborhood's public school "Chile" and in his free time he drew and made gesso sculptures at home.

1940 – 1942

To supplement his family's income, Gurvich worked after school in a rubber raincoat factory and took evening courses at the National School of Fine Arts with José Cúneo a renowned Uruguayan painter. Gurvich always regarded him with affection, even after he left Cúneo's instruction to join the Taller Torres-García, and in spite of Cúneo's 1944 criticisms of Torres-García's teaching techniques, published in *El País*.

1943-1944

Took violin lessons with David Julber, a Russian émigré who also taught Horacio, Torres-García's younger son, who would remain Gurvich's close friend for the rest of his life. At Julber's, Gurvich

was exposed to paintings by Torres-García and his students hanging on the walls. In 1944, he is introduced to Torres-García himself and by the end of the year, joins the *Taller Torres-García*.



1945

In January, he participates in the 20th group show of the *Taller Torres-García*. He painted still lifes, landscapes, harbor scenes and portraits of his mother and sister.

1948

His sister Miriam, a member of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Montevideo, immigrated to Israel; she was one of the founders of the Kibbutz Ramot Menashe.

1951

Moved into a couple of rooms in an old house across from the harbor. Painted the view from the window and portraits in which the model is seated next to it; he also frequented the cafes and painted many café scenes. Strived to give a personal character to his constructivist compositions and painted color planes disassociated from the line that defined the objects. He decorated ceramic pieces, designed furniture in the constructivist style and took over teaching at the *Taller Torres-García* while Julio Alpuy was away.

1952-1953

Romance with Estella Medina, a young theatre actress. Through her, he was commissioned to design the sets for several independent theatre companies then thriving in Montevideo: Teatro del Pueblo, El Tinglado, La Máscara y Club de Teatro. He worked on the scenery for the latter's production of *Minnie la Candida* by Montempelli, directed by Laura Escalante. The *Taller* artists, through their friendship with Jorge de Arteaga, a founder of Montevideo's Cine Club, designed brochures for the Club's film screenings.

1954

Traveled to Europe and stayed in Madrid for three months. Saw Bosch and Breughel's work at the Prado Museum where he copied a painting by Goya and the head of a Menina by Velazquez. Met Spanish art critic José Moreno Galván. Traveled to Italy, and is struck by Breughel's *Parable of the Blind* at the Museo Nazionale in Naples.



1955

He convinced a young ceramist in Rome to allow him to work in her studio in exchange for painting her portrait. The pieces he created there were exhibited at the San Marco Gallery in Rome. He sold enough to pay for his trip to Israel, during which he settled at the kibbutz Ramot Menashe with his sister and worked as a shepherd. In the ceramic studio of an English artist in Tel Aviv, he made and decorated vessels and menorahs. Painted a large mural in the communal dining room of the Kibbutz. According to his wife Julia, the mural subject was inspired by Hesiod, who as a shepherd had a vision to create didactic poetry. Gurvich departed from the constructivist style by dividing the wall surface into color compartments; in each of them he painted animals raised at the Kibbutz- bees, sheep, goats, a cow- view of the fields, the buildings and barns. He read the 16th Century Spanish poet Garcilaso de la Vega, whose poems developed the tropes of love and pastoral settings.

1956

April exhibition at the Katz Gallery in Tel Aviv. While at the Kibbutz, he painted *Homage to Breugel* depicting peasants involved in rural labor. Met Horacio Torres in Paris and they travel to Amsterdam and Spain.

1957

Upon returning to Montevideo, he moved into fellow artist Gonzalo Fonseca's house in El Cerro, a working class neighborhood overlooking Montevideo's harbor bay. He painted Antonio Machado's poems on the walls of his room. Taught at the *Taller Torres-García* and takes charge of classes there after Julio Alpuy, who left Uruguay to live abroad. Gurvich sets up a ceramic workshop at the *Taller*. Designed sets for *Dos en el Tejado* by Juan Carlos Legido Club de Teatro.

1959

Painted abstract works in black and white related to musical theory and composition.

1960

Married Julia Añorga, a history professor. Traveled to Buenos Aires. This is an important experimental during which he tried very different painting styles-constructivist, realistic, in cardboard reliefs, etc.-by creating variation of the still life. He applied layers of enamel paint in contrasting colors to a series of wood panels, which he first allowed to dry and then scratches the surface with delicate graphisms that exposed the underlying colors.

**1962**

Painted several large constructivist murals in different techniques, fresco, tiles, and cement and gesso reliefs. The largest of these, 17 meters wide, was made on wood panels for the Cerro branch of the Pension Fund (Caja de Pensiones del Cerro). Years later, it was nearly destroyed when the branch was closed and the panels were dismantled; nearly tossed in a furnace, they were saved by an architect who recognized them. Today, the restored mural is installed at Montevideo's central branch of the BPS. (Uruguay's Banco de Previsión Social).

1963

His son Martín is born.

1964

Second trip to the Kibbutz, this time with his wife and son. The family integrated into the communal life style and Gurvich again works as a shepherd by day and painted in the afternoon; this stable environment allowed him to produce a large number of works. Visited Tel Aviv frequently and saw Maurice Béjart's *Ballet du XXè Siècle*, which inspired a series of drawings and paintings.

1965

Travels to Greece and concludes that although he admires the classical spirit he cannot do without expression. Read Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Illustrated Man*, which inspired him a number of works.

1966

Returned to Montevideo. The spiral takes over in his compositions and he achieves a visual expansion of the picture plane by means of different devices: a line across the picture plane suggestive of the horizon, perspective lines that converge in a point in the canvas, floating round shapes that contain within mini universes of symbols and figures. Moved to a house one block north in the same street in El Cerro (Polonia 3286) and dedicates one large room to a ceramic studio. A group of young artists study with him; as in the renaissance workshops, they stayed at his house the whole day, painting, making ceramics, and engaging in everyday tasks like sweeping the floor and having their meals with Gurvich and his family. Thanks to their help, Gurvich was able to produce an important number of intricate ceramic sculptures by devising a sort of assembly line of elements that his students prepared ahead of time.

1967

Designed the sets for the ballet *Carmina Burana* choreographed by the Russian dancer Yurek Jablewsky, director of the SODRE (Uruguay's Servicio Oficial de Radiodifusión y Espectáculos). Exhibited a large number of his new work in Montevideo.

1969

Third trip to Europe and to the Kibbutz to visit his ailing parents who moved there in 1963.

**1970**

Left Israel and stayed in Paris on his way to New York. Arrived in New York in September to attend the opening of Torres-García's retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum. Lived in Brentwood, Long Island with his cousins Leo and Sam Sadinsky, both survivors of Dachau and Awshwitz. Learned about the concentration camp horrors they had endured and how other family members had been killed.

Moved to Manhattan's Lower East side, on 11th St. between Avenues A and B, a rough neighborhood at the time, and painted in a small basement studio. He found a ceramic workshop nearby where he purchased clay and fired his finished pieces. Worked in a factory that mass produced paintings for hotels.

Met the Colombian art critic Alvaro Medina, who referred Gurvich to the art dealer Jean Aberbach. Aberbach commissioned a series of paintings based on the Jewish festivals, which were loaned to the Ramaz School in Manhattan and later were exhibited at the Jewish Museum in *The Jewish experience in the Art of the Twentieth Century*. A solo exhibition of his work was scheduled for 1975 at the Jewish Museum.

1974

Gurvich learned that his heart was failing, but did little to protect his health. A massive stroke killed him in the early afternoon of June 24, 1974 while he was alone at home waiting for his wife and son to return from school.

