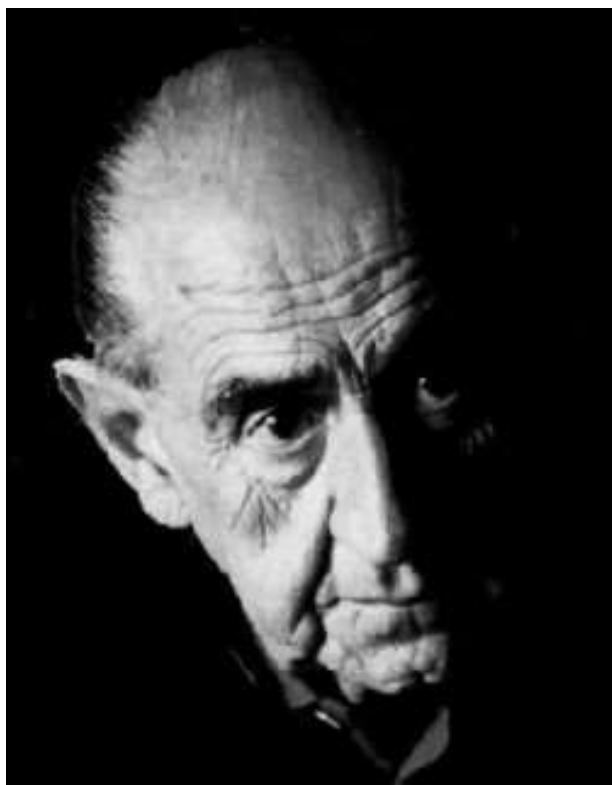


Alberto Breccia: Salvation in the Light and Dark

Breccia is an artist I have known about for years but never really had the chance to explore until recently. Through my research I came to the conclusion that this is largely due to the fact that almost none of his work has been translated into English. I know we are missing out on some of the most important comic works produced in foreign markets just like we are missing out on important literature, music and film by not having it in a form we can understand. With sequential art, perhaps we are a bit more to blame for this as often the art might be enough to make it worth exploring. We can share some of this blame with the distributors not making the works available to us. So, although I think it is a crime we don't all know Breccia like we know Kirby and Eisner, it is also very understandable. Let me start to remedy this a little by introducing you to Alberto Breccia and his incredible comic work. He has been called the *Master of Light and Dark*, and for good reasons.



I did debate combining this article with my Jack Kirby article and to mirror the two careers as they do have things in common. They were born within about 18 months of each other and died only about 3 months apart. They lived in such different worlds but the world they experienced was the same having grown up in the post

WWI era, having lived through the depression while in their early working year and seeing the struggles of their families. They both lived through WWII. Their lives did diverge quite a bit at this time as Jack returned to post war America and a boom and Breccia lived through some of the harshest political years in his own country. Both artists started to experiment independently with collage late in their careers. It would be an interesting theme to write on but in the end I decided I really wanted to just focus on Breccia in a single article. I will start with a brief biography and overview of his career before diving into more depth on various stages and publications during his career. My goal is to introduce you to his works and be through and engaging enough to hold your interest but not exhaustive.

Alberto Breccia was born in Montevideo, Uruguay on April 15, 1919. His family moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina



Alberto Breccia in Studio

when he was just 3. He grew up in the Mataderos neighborhood which was working class and known for its slaughter houses. Breccia's father worked in a factory and Alberto grew up in a world surrounded by chimneys, delinquents, tango and rats. His father played the clarinet which Alberto also learned and in interviews he confessed to liking Jazz music and dancing on the weekends. His first employment was working in a tripe plant with his father but Alberto was also a self-taught artist with a talent. While doing factory work, he submitted his art to various publications and was published as early as 1937. By 1938, he left the factory floor for the publishing industry working for *El Resero*, a magazine for which he drew covers. Quickly moving on to the publishing house Manuel Lainez

in 1939, he had art published in magazines that included *Tit-Bits*, *Rataplan* and *El Gorrion*. Although he drew comic gags, he also created several comic strips based on popular novels of the time such as *Kid Rio Grande*, *El Vengador* along with some adventure strips. In 1944 he left Lainez publishing and went on to work freelance. He got married and over the next few years had 3 children. The three children, Enrique, Cristina and Patricia would all go on to be comic artists. In 1946 he started to work with *Patoruzito*, a weekly publication for which he created several adventure stories including *Jean de la Martinica*, *El Club de Aventureros* and *Vito Nervio*. *Vito Nervio*, which he took over from Emilio Cortinas, went on to be among his most successful early works and was a crime series that lasted until 1949. For these 15 years, Breccia worked tirelessly providing for his family, honing his craft and lamenting the constraints put upon him by his editors to not vary in style for fear of losing readers. During these years he also produced more than 300 illustrations for children's books, textbooks, advertising campaigns and other comic related works. Breccia also took on his first academic role as a professor at the *L'Escuela Panamericana de Arte de Buenos Aires* in the mid 1950's where he would teach the art of comics to the next generation of

artists alongside Hugo Pratt.

Around 1957, Breccia became an honorary member of a group of artists living in Argentina at the time. They called themselves the **Group of Venice** which included Italian expatriates Hugo Pratt and Dino Battaglia. Other members of this group over time would include Horacio Lalia, Ido Pavone, Alberto Ongaro, Francisco Solano Lopez (see previous *El Eternauta* article *CFA-APA 101*), Carlos Cruz and Arturo Del Castillo. This group were all associated with Héctor Germán



Alberto Breccia (far right) With Other Comic Artists circa 1957.

Héctor Germán Oesterheld HGO (1919-1977)

Born July 23, 1919 in Buenos Aires. Journalist and comic writer known for his outspoken political views. He was part of the *Group of*

from the government. After these controversial works, Oesterheld went on to publish even more works critiquing the regime, went into hiding and is believed to have joined his daughters in the **Monteneros** guerilla group. He disappeared along with his four daughters and their husbands in 1976 and is presumed to have been executed by regime's death squads or other agencies. In 1979, Alberto Ongario, another member of the Group of Venice enquired about HGO's disappearance and is said to have received the reply.



We did away with him because he wrote the most beautiful story of Che Guevara.

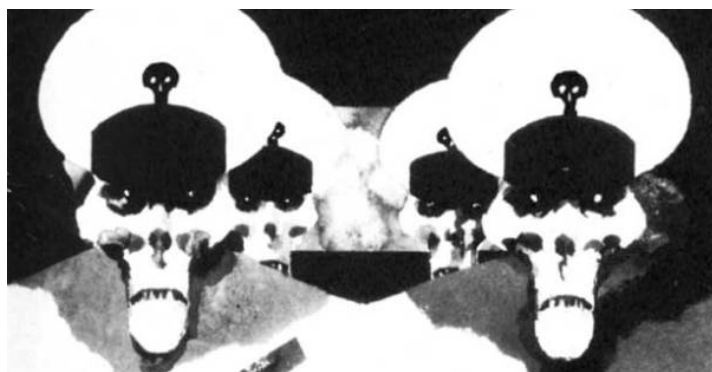
Venice along with Alberto Breccia, Hugo Pratt, Dino Battaglia and other ex-patriot artists fleeing after the War. In 1957, along with his brother Jorge, he created *Editorial Frontera* that would publish the works from this group and other Argentinian artists including Alberto Breccia. *Ernie Pike* was a war comic that he wrote and published in the *Hora Cero* (Zero Hour) title by his company. Both Hugo Pratt and Alberto Breccia illustrated these stories. HGO and Breccia collaborated on *Richard Long*, *Sherlock Time*, *Mort Cinder*, *El Eternauta* and biographies of Che Guevara and Evita Peron. The last four of these can be seen as politically subversive and garnered increased attention

Oesterheld's widow, Elsa Sánchez, was involved in the protests **Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo** by the mothers of the disappeared. She rescued and raised one of her two grandchildren born while her daughters were in captivity.



Oesterheld and his publication **Frontera Editorial** and its **Hora Cero** title (Zero Hour). Breccia would begin to work more with Oesterheld, a writer I have introduced to you in a previous CFA-APA submission. Starting with **Ernie Pike**, the collaboration of Breccia and Oesterheld produced much of the most important works of both creators' careers including **Mort Cinder**. **Mort Cinder** is widely considered Breccia's masterpiece. An interesting side note is that Breccia's friend, assistant and former student Horacio Lalia was the model for Mort Cinder and Breccia used his own likeness for another character in the story. Breccia never used assistants in his work.

In the 1960's Breccia began to work for European publishers via Bardon Arts. The Barcelona based art agency commissioned works for both the Spanish and British comic industry. Breccia later moved to London for a year to work for Fleetway but had to return as his wife's health was failing. The early 1960's were a very formative time in Breccia's career. Breccia did illustration work for **Biliken Magazine** and this is where he started to experiment with other techniques. After his wife died in 1966, Breccia founded the **Instituto de Arte** along with Jose Luis Salinas. For the next several years he would focus on teaching, developing his style and writing a textbook on comic art **Tecnica de la Historieta**. He remained director at the school until 1971. During this time, his comic output declined although he returned to comics in 1967 and produced some of his most notable creations including Oesterheld's reworked **El Eternauta** and a comic biography on Che Guevara which was based on a script by Oesterheld. He collaborated with his son Enrique on the Che project and the success of this project led to increased scrutiny by the State Information Services and threats.



Indeed, the artwork for all of **Life of Che** book was seized and destroyed by the secret police and the printer was executed. Breccia feared he would be arrested and buried

Breccia

the proofs in his yard to hide them. The regime itself came to an end in 1983 with the Falkland Wars and Argentina had to recover from those dark times. The effects of the Dirty War, The Black Years and the disappearance of Oesterheld and others would weigh heavily on Breccia and these themes would pervade his later works.

After **El Eternauta** and **La Vida del Che**, the association with Oesterheld, came to an end as Breccia's new found popularity in Europe took him onto other projects.

The 1970's would prove to be the most innovative and progressive for Alberto Breccia. He started to take the experimentation he was doing in the late 60's and further refined and perfected his unique avant-garde approach. It is during this time period he would begin to work with Carlos Trillo as a writer. Breccia's work was gaining popularity in Europe and he would produce several projects for this market. The early to mid-70's saw Breccia travelling to Europe for work and later lived there for several years only returning to Argentina from time to time. During the 1980's, he would produce some very important work although one might argue that his work from the 1969 to 1983 is his most creative and lucid. 1983's **Perramus** is a scathing look at Argentina's modern history. Breccia continued to produce comic work right up until his death on November 10th, 1993 in Buenos Aires.

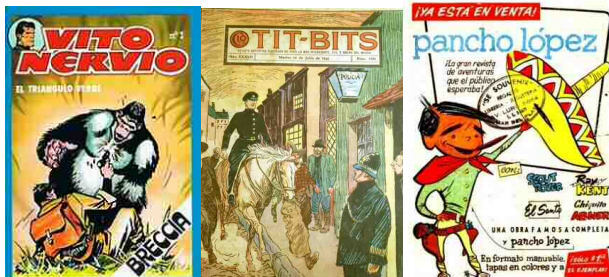
Breccia was internationally well respected during his career and recognized with multiple national and international awards including the Yellow Kid Award at Lucca in 1973.



Breccia 1993

Comic Bibliography (Selective)

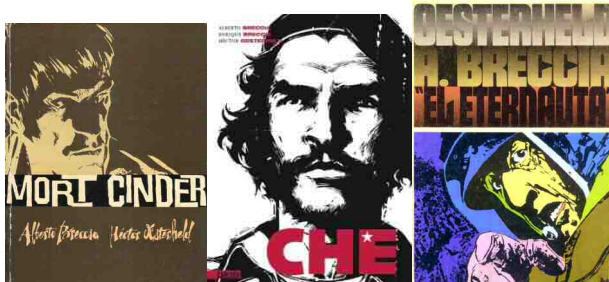
- **Mariquita Terremoto** (1939)
- **Kid de Río Grande** (1939-1947)
- **El Vengador** (1939)
- **Jean de Martinica** (1945)
- **Vito Nervio** (1946–1959 and 1974) multiple titles - written by Leonardo Wadel



- **Pancho López** (1956)
- **Dr. Morgue** (1957)
- **Ernie Pike** (1957) written by Oesterheld
- **Spy13/X13** (1958) for Fleetway Publication
- **Sherlock Time** (1958–1959) written by Oesterheld
- **Buck John** (1961) Fleetway Publications
- **Kit Carson #119** (1962) Fleetway Publications



- **Mision Thyraine** (1961) written by Leonardo Wadel
- **Mort Cinder** (1962–1964) 3 volumes - written by Oesterheld
- **Les cent dollars maudits** (1965)
- **Richard Long** (1966) written by Oesterheld
- **El misterio del Kain Merah** (1968)
- **La vida del Che** (1968) written by Oesterheld, additional art by Enrique Breccia



- **El Eternauta** (1969 edition) written by Oesterheld
- **No, no abras nunca esa puerta** (1969)
- **Evita, vida y obra de Peron** (1970) written by Oesterheld
- **Platos voladores al ataque!!** (1971) written by

Oesterheld

- **Squadra Zenith** (1972–1974) – multiple titles
- **Los mitos de Cthulhu** (1973) written by Norberto Buscaglia based on H.P. Lovecraft
- **Un tal Daneri** (1974–1978) written by Trillo
- **El corazón delator** (1975) from a text by Edgar Allan Poe
- **El Aire** (1976) written by Guillermo Saccomanno
- **Nadie** (1977) written by Trillo
- **Donde Bajan Y Suben Las Mareas** (1977)
- **La parta de mono** (1977)
- **El Viajero de Gris** (1978-1980)
- **El Hombre de Azul** (1979)
- **El Inquilino** (1979)
- **Estas Bellas Manos Velludas** (1979)
- **Miedo** (1979)
- **Las Mellizas** (1980)
- **El fin** (1980)
- **Despues** (1980)
- **El Aqujero** (1980)
- **Chi ha paura delle fiabe?** (1981) – a series of adult themed fairy tales
- **Recordando Al Senor K** (1981)
- **Buscavidas** (1981) written by Trillo
- **Perramus** (1983) 4 volumes - written by Juan Sasturain



- **Drácula, Dacul, Vlad?, Bah...** (1984)
- **Desfiles Nocturno** (1984)
- **La gallina degollada** (1985)
- **Incubi** (1985) – stories by Edgar Allan Poe and others
- **Dibujar o no** (1985)
- **Semejante la noche** (1988)
- **Anitperiplea** (1988)
- **La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar** (1989)
- **Palabras sueltas, colores cautivos** (1989) – part of collected works of various artists
- **Historias con moraleja** (1991) – includes various stories including Dr. Jekyll
- **Informe sobre ciegos** (1991) from text by Ernest Sabato
- **El Dorado, el delirio de Lope de Aguirre** (1992) written by Carlos Albiac

The Early Years: Learning the Trade

To understand Breccia, it is also important to understand the history of Argentina's politics and the milieu in which he and other creators lived through. I have mentioned the Dirty War but prior to that there were many decades of political, economic and social unrest in Argentina. A military coupe in 1930 ended the civilian rule until the mid-1980s. During this time there were several coupes, military juntas and dictatorships. Human rights and the concerns and welfare of the population were neglected. It was a time of high unemployment, strikes and uncontrolled inflation. These events bring us up until the final coupe in 1976 and The Black Years which were a time of disappearances, mass executions and a population living in fear. Many of the atrocities were to be uncovered as mass graves years later.

Alberto started to draw at a young age and recalls drawing all the time. He claimed to having been a comedian at heart and he drew because he enjoyed it. These early drawing years occurred during the 1930's which he referred to as the "infamous decade" where Argentina like the rest of the world was in a depression that was also compounded by the new military government. He has said in interviews that he drew in his spare time when he was not working at the factory and thought of it as a way to get out of his situation in life. His skill started to develop and he offered his works to various publications who would publish him. At first he was not paid but later he was given nominal compensation for his work. In one 1990 interview he recall

The remuneration I received for these pieces was ridiculously low. I think I earned just about enough to buy a handkerchief to dry my tears!

He was soon asked to draw adventure strips of which he knew nothing and so he found newspapers and publications to study the artwork of greats like Milton Caniff, Alex Raymond, Alfred Andriola and Burne Hogarth. When asked if he liked comic books, Breccia said no, he never read them and preferred humorous comics.

Below is a short excerpt from an interview Breccia gave in 1992. Published in **Shadows and Light: Conversations with Latino Imparato** by Vertige Graphic in 1992.

You have often said that becoming a cartoonist was for you the only possibility to free yourself from your worker's condition ...

I've been drawing since I was a child. When I was a kid I was drawing all the time, and even after I started working as a worker, I continued to draw. At that time, I'm talking about the years 1933 - 34, the only thing I could do outside my work as a laborer at the slaughterhouse was to draw. I started to propose my drawings to different magazines. At first I worked for free, then they began to buy some of them. In this way I was able to gradually leave my work at the slaughterhouse. For years, during my spare time, I went to editorial magazines to show my work and at the same time I was trying to get hired.

What kind of drawings was it?



They were humorous drawings. I had created a character and drawn some three hundred comics. I sold ten of them which were not even published.

Why this choice to make humorous comics?

It was the only kind of comic that was produced in Argentina at that time. The only other published comic strips were comics of English origin: boxes with text below, like legends. The American cartoon, Alex Raymond for example, was totally unknown. They arrived in Argentina only a few years later.



How did you move from humorous comics to adventure comics?

*One day, as I was still looking for work, I landed in the offices of the publishing house Lainez, a very important house at the time, which published a large number of cartoon magazines supplied by English unions. My humorous work did not interest them. They wanted adventure stories and they asked me to make some boards for the next day. I had never done that! I was hurrying home and I started to look at newspapers and magazines to get an idea. I was desperate. With a script and a few pages to deliver the next day, I did not know at all how to do it. At that time the newspaper **La Prensa** published **Charlie Chan**, a comic strip by Alfredo Andriola. On the basis of Andriola's work I wrote a script, a wacky thriller, and during the night I drew one or two boards. The next day I went to Lainez to show what I had done. To my surprise the publisher accepted my work! That's how I started drawing adventure comics. I wrote the subjects, I developed the script, I realized the plates, the lettering. If there was any color to add, I did it myself. In short, I was doing everything from A to Z.*

How many years have you worked that way?

*When I started, I was eighteen and I continued until the age of thirty. Then I joined the team of the magazine **Patoruzito** which was a magazine with a very modern*

formula for the time. There were a lot of North American comics and a lot of comic strips made in Argentina. These were stories conceived with a very modern and innovative spirit.



Gentleman Jim 1944

Who were the designers who influenced your debut?

Milton Caniff. Looking at his works I learned to tell in pictures. I learned to compose a box, a page. I had to learn all this on my own: I had not attended any school and I was drawing very badly. I began to study composition, anatomy, perspective; I studied anatomy for more than twenty years. I was already drawing my first stories and at the same time I was studying. One day, in front of a box that I could not draw as I wanted, I had a fit of helplessness and I locked myself in the bathroom to cry. I wanted to be a draftsman, a good draftsman. So I decided to devote myself as much as possible to the study of drawing. Even when I was already drawing Vito Nervio and Sherlock Time, I continued to study.



Jean de la Martinica 1947

braccio

During these early years, Breccia produced a number of comic strips with adventure, western and crime themes. The work was competent but didn't stand out as he had yet to mature.

Being entirely self-taught, this was a time of developing technique and learning the language of sequential art. Breccia talks about focusing on studying and draftsmanship during this formative time. I think we see a significant progression in his art during this decade as Breccia learns the trade of panel design, storytelling and artistry.

The following decade leading up to his involvement with Oesterheld, we see a progression in style. Much of his work during this time was for **Vito Nervio** who did restrict his growth as an artist. During this time, he was also working on other projects including children's books. It is also during this decade we start to see hints of the line work and portraiture that would later become his signature style.



Here are three examples from **Vito Nervio** showing the progression from a typical adventure strip similar to **Terry and the Pirates** to a more confident and defined style. By this point, Breccia was starting to stand out as a creator and to leave his mark.



breccia



In the very popular, **Pancho Lopez** (1957) we see Breccia working in a more humorous style. Even though the subject matter is quite different, we can already see some of his distinctive lines.



At the end of the 1950's, Breccia started to do work for Fleetway, a British publication company and moved to London for a period of time. At that time, the British comic industry was booming and publishers like Fleetway sought out talent from the international stage.



It would take meeting with Oesterheld and a relationship with Hugo Pratt to push Breccia on to the next stage of his career. The 1957 collaboration with Oesterheld on *Ernie Pike* would be the first of many.

experimentation that would define the next two decades of Breccia's career. In the three examples from *Sherlock Time* below, we can see the use of shading and light, panel abstraction and darker themes... all would become Breccia hallmarks.



Ernie Pike

Breccia's work on *Ernie Pike* progresses quickly and we can see Breccia's style starting to really come through. *Sherlock Time* can be considered the transition comic between these stages of Breccia's career. In this partial page from *Sherlock Time* we can see the beginning of

Breccia

The Sixties: Breccia Finds His Voice

The 1960's proved to be the most important in Breccia's development and would lead the ground work for the incredible direction he would take in the following decades. The majority of his work with Oesterheld also occurred during this decade.

One of the defining moments in Breccia's development he attributes to Hugo Pratt giving him a kick to be more. He recounts an evening in Palermo with Pratt angrily telling him that

You are a cheap whore, because you're doing shit and can do something better.

Although annoyed by this, Alberto agreed and began to take a different path. It is about this time we see two styles of Breccia develop. One is considered the bread and butter style that is fitting for comics and pays the bills and the other is more personal and evolutionary.



Mort Cinder is a masterpiece and many consider it Breccia's most important work. He began work on this dark and moody thesis written by Oesterheld in 1961 and continued a total of 3 volumes until 1964. **Mort Cinder** is the story of a man that has lived through all of mankind's history including the building of the Tower of Babel and World War I. He is a character who reawakens upon his death at a different time and continues to live. In the first story, he is aided by Ezra Winston, an antique dealer modeled after Breccia himself. There are recurrent characters throughout Breccia's work that resemble the artist and autobiographical themes and undertones also

Breccia

reoccur. Although there have been hints of it before, this is the tome in which Breccia really starts to master light and dark though the use of chiaroscuro (using light, shadow and shapes to define objects). **Mort Cinder** has been described as

"an unquiet conscience of humanity, a witness, sometimes sorrowfully torpid, of the great and small events of the Man, though often a rebellious one who never surrendered to those trying to silence him" (Alessio Lega)



Excerpts from an interview with Alberto Breccia made in Barcelona in 1973 by Antonio Martin for **Bang!**

Innovation has been at the level of style, or treatment?

No, the concept. Style is relative. I do not believe in styles, styles are mannerism. It was a change of concept and I think it was very important. One must take into account the difficulty of moving in the art, especially, after many years in the same genre. In 1962, came Mort Cinder. In this period my wife became very ill, she was given a kidney transplant but she died, this ravaged me in every way, morally and economically. I then left this comic while 206 pages had already been drawn, because I then earned 4,500 pesos a week and my wife needed 5,000 pesos per

day. I abandoned everything and with friends we founded a school which was called the Institute of Art and of which I was director until 1971; We came to have forty-five professors, among the best of what could be found in Buenos Aires for each specialty: drawing, illustration, advertising, historieta, cinema, etc., we had up to 700 students. However, it did not work, the partners finally scattered, I got tired and I stopped.

Who did you draw "Mort Cinder" for?

... was not intended for a specific publication, it came out because it came out, and was published complete, in a weekly magazine that had almost no printing, which was very poor, until it was finished. The first adventure never came out because there was a problem with "Mort Cinder" whose argument we were discussing with Oesterheld three months, until he was born as he was born. I started to look for the character, but then, in the cold ... Then I asked him, "you begin the adventure, but until fifteen or twenty pages does not appear Mort Cinder, that the old man appears, that the old man is going to be me ...".

To make "Mort Cinder" did you work with photography? Does all that shadow play you do spontaneously or do you orient yourself with some kind of photography?

... no, no, I do not use photography at all. For example, to make the face of "Mort Cinder" I ended up inspired by a friend, but not in his photographs, but directly: he was with me while I drew.

(It has been previously noted that Argentinian comic artist Horacio Lalia was the model for Mort Cinder.)



In 1968, a biography on Che Guevara written by Oesterheld was published. *La Vida del Che* was a project that Breccia's eldest son Enrique also worked on, alongside his father. The work unfolded over 2 years during a time after his wife's death and after starting the Art School.

Something we have known in Spain of what happened with the "Life of Ché", but what exactly was it?

... well, with the "Ché" happened the most unusual things. The "Ché" can be a show. It was a bad business from an economic point of view, but very nice to do it. The "Life of Ché" caused a wave of opinion, especially in the government. Onganía, even published an



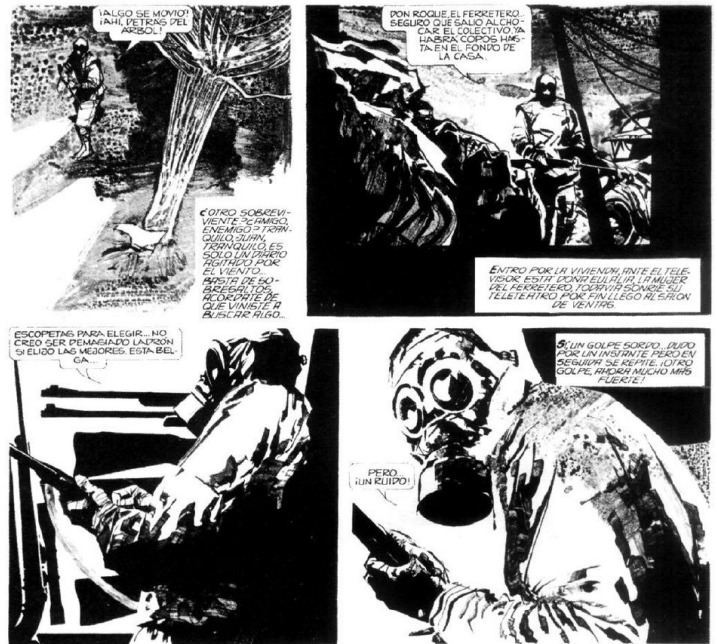
breccia

editorial in the newspaper La Nación beating me to death. That caused the Embassy of the United States to buy it and from that the Embassy gives the SINE - State Information Service - that went to my house and made me a file. The Embassy called me, called us to congratulate us and to make us do the life of Kennedy, which was not done, even though they bought the edition ... And then the Army, while the SINE was making me a subversive element, asked me to make a "History of the Argentine Army" to distribute among the soldiers, I asked for a high price per page and then it was not done.

The book on "Ché", what originals are left?

... left... very little, it ended up being kidnapped and burned, also the originals ... Everything.

There are some pages in **Che** in which we see Breccia start to use more experimental techniques, a hint of what is to come in terms of style and lighting. Abstraction and impressionistic figurative work starts to evolve and we see more use of texture and different approaches to form.



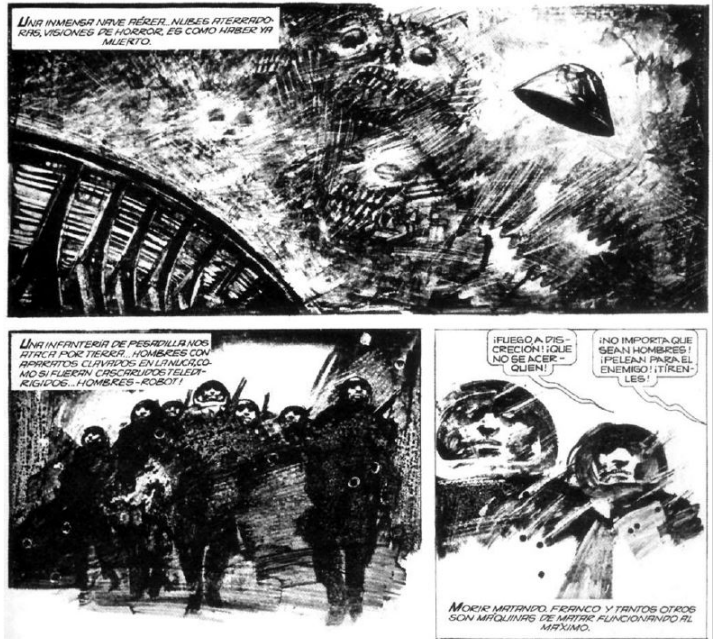
The final major book in the 1960's for Breccia and Oesterheld was a reworked version of **El Eternauta**. The original story was serialized in 1957 to 1959 in **Hero Cero** written by Oesterheld and illustrated by Francisco Solano Lopez (CFA-APA 101). In this book, we follow the events of an alien invasion from the microscopic view of a single man in Buenos Aires as he and his friends fight for the survival of mankind. Juan Salvo, the main character became a cultural symbol of the everyman fighting the system. Oesterheld revisited this work and rewrote it as a much more directed critique of the current regime, the state of Argentina and US imperialism.

breccia

Lopez was approached to redraw it but declined and the work fell to Breccia. It would prove to be among the last collaborations with Oesterheld. Che, Evita and **El Eternauta** made the creators fear for their safety. Oesterheld went into hiding and continued to speak out while Breccia went on to create other projects.

Why was it redrawn "El Eternauta" already existing the first version, that had done years before Solano?

... the publisher Atlántida approached Solano and they did not convince him, so he(the publisher) wanted something new, which also did not convince him because in the last issue he apologized to the readers ...



Does this explain that his version of "The Eternauta" is summarized with respect to that of Solano or was something initially planned by Oesterheld?

... no, he did not think to summarize it, because Oesterheld is a scriptwriter, that is, he is an exceptional storyteller, but he is not a screenwriter. With him you have to do everything, you have to cut, you have to do something different from what he gives. He writes a lot and does not realize that no, you cannot write so much. The Eternauta has texts and texts, too many, and he prolonged history; So I decided to cut it, because if not, it would end up being very heavy.

The Seventies Breccia Experiments

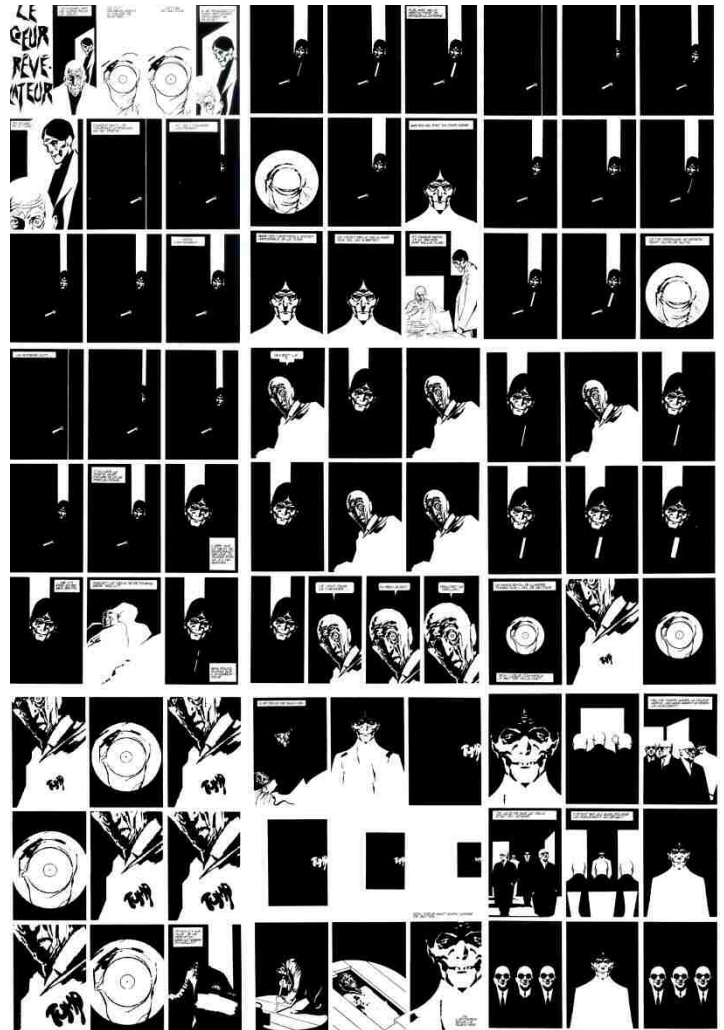
This is a decade of terrible change in Argentina with the final coupe and beginning of the Dirty War and the Black Years. It is a decade in which Breccia's long-time friend and co-creator Oesterheld would go into hiding only to eventually be captured and presumed killed with his 4 daughters. It is also the years following his wife's death and the collapse of his school. It seems the dark economic and political backdrops compounded with his personal tragedies were a catalyst for change and for some incredible experimentation. Breccia's darkest and most ground-breaking work would stem from this climate.

There are over a dozen works by Breccia in this decade and each is worthy of its own dissection. Rather than trying to be that complete, I will give you an overview of the art so you can see why Breccia is considered by many to among the greatest artists ever to work in the genre. I will delve a bit deeper into one of his works, *Viajero de Gris* as I own a page from it and having had a chance to overview his work, I think it is a good example of how much the work varied within a single opus.



One of the earlier projects of the 1970's was an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's stories of Cthulhu. Breccia approaches the source material with a very dark and abstract vision. What results is a far more menacing and incomprehensible form that is reminiscent of a Rorschach test. Not only exploring technique and media, Breccia was pushing himself with layouts and storytelling. In the Edgar Allen Poe adaptations of *El corazón delator*, we see the use of the 9 panel grid over 9 pages to tell the story of the Tell

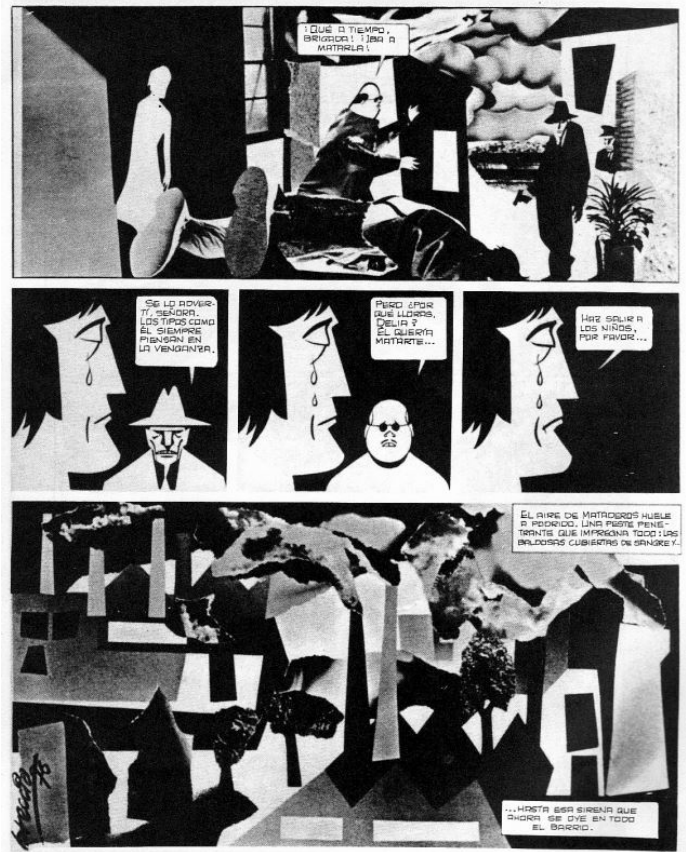
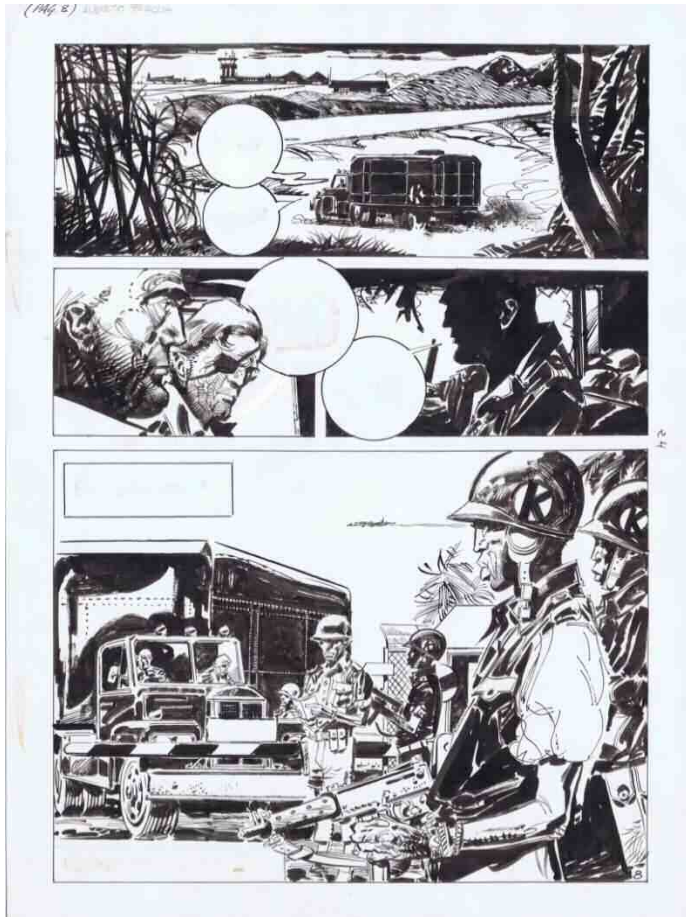
Tale Heart. There are multiple uses of stats and repetition as he sets up a rhythm and cadence to his layouts.



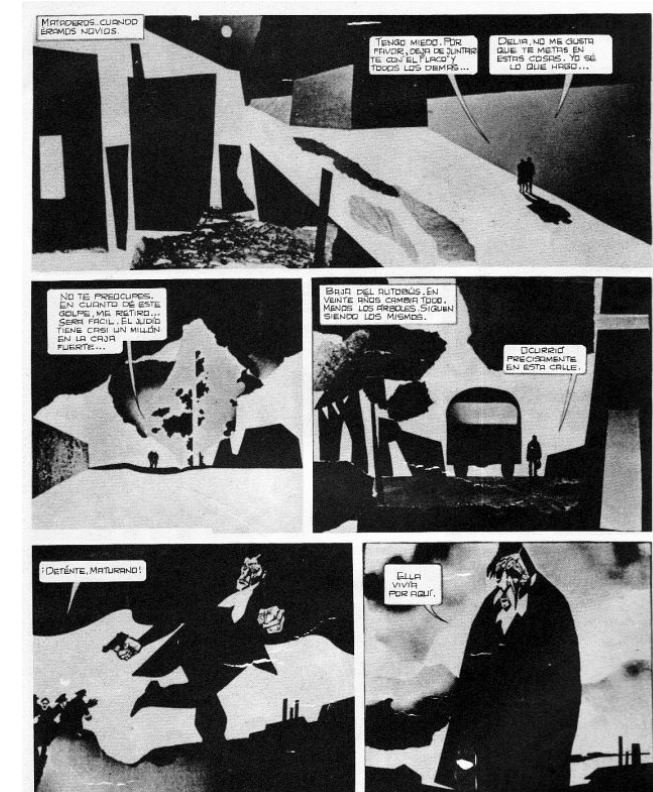
Nine page sequence from *El Corazon Delator*

The page below is in my collection and is from *Nadie* (1977). It is an example of Breccia's work that was done for a more commercial market, his bread and butter if you will. Breccia would continue to use the two different approaches to his work throughout his later career although later works were more personal and avant-garde. The art on *Nadie* is very interesting, stylized, proficient and outstanding in its own right but when put next to pages from *El Viajero de Gris* done around the same time... it is hard to compare. Below are pages from *El Aire* (1976) and *El Hombre de Azul* where we see Breccia's experimentation and the use of color. You will note that on these pages we start seeing the use of collage techniques with more emphasis on form and mood. At this time, most of what you see was done as original art but on other projects there would be the heavy use of stats and other mixed media material which he explained were used

in order to save time. The work Breccia did in the 1970's was far ahead of it is time and even now, I think it is still far ahead of our time. His influence on a number



of European artists and some North American ones is profound. I don't think there would be a Dave McKean or Bill Sienkiewicz if there had not been a Toppi or Breccia.



by Jeff Singh

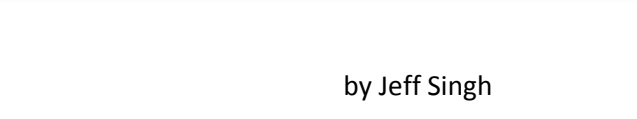


Viajero de Gris (Gray Voyager) was published in 1978. It harkens back to the darkness in Breccia's world. It starts with a prisoner in a prison who escapes his world through his imagination and comics. Clearly this can be taken very literally of Breccia's own situation. Each time the prisoner returns to reality of his captivity after his escape. These themes also echo back to *Mort Cinder* and his immortality and *Sherlock Time* and *El Eternauta* with the time travelling themes. I chose this book to feature as I find Breccia's full palate on display from realism to abstraction and all things in-between. We start the story with the bleak and lonely world of a prison and this is also where the story ends. Note the use of texture, form and shape that Breccia effortlessly applies. Lines, lighting and panel borders blend into pages that flow and transcend what we normally expect in a comic. There is light and dark, there is beauty and ugliness, there is joy and there is suffering, there is humanity and inhumanity... this is the world of Alberto Breccia.

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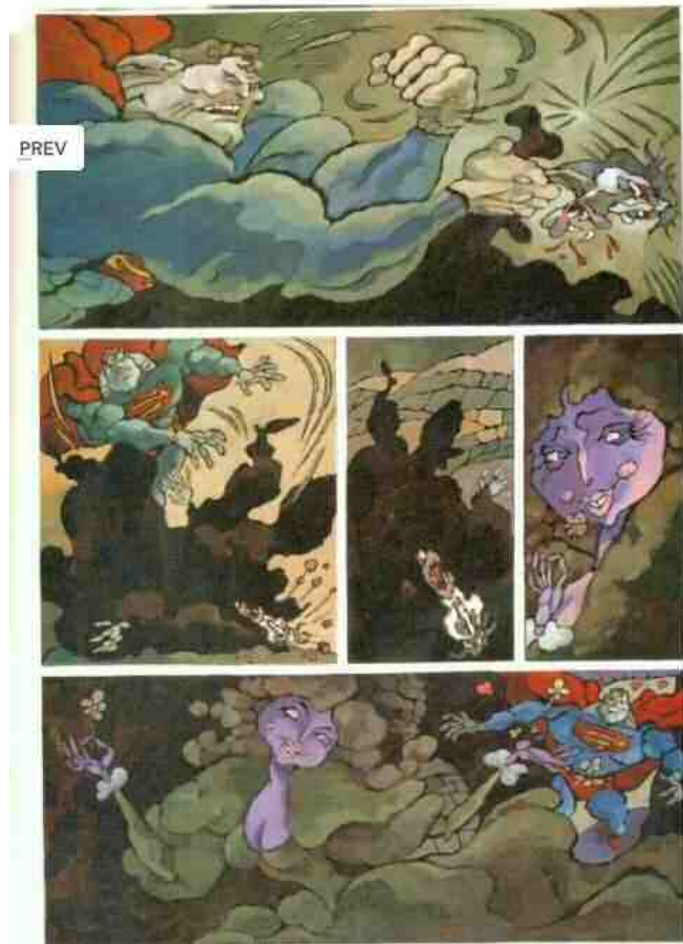


breccia



The Eighties: Evolution

This decade saw Breccia taking his work further into the swathe he had cut during the previous decade. There is evolution, refinement and pushing of the vocabulary that Breccia had already created. The most notable works for this era are *Perramus* and *Dracula*. There was increased use of color, painting and collage during this period and fewer mainstream projects.



Dracula has several stories that start out with a humorous vampire with dyspepsia and a toothache that needs to see a dentist. Like much of Breccia's work, there are underlying themes and messages that are there for those that look for them. The final Dracula tale is the darkest. Here are some pages and a famous panel that is worthy of a bit of dissection.

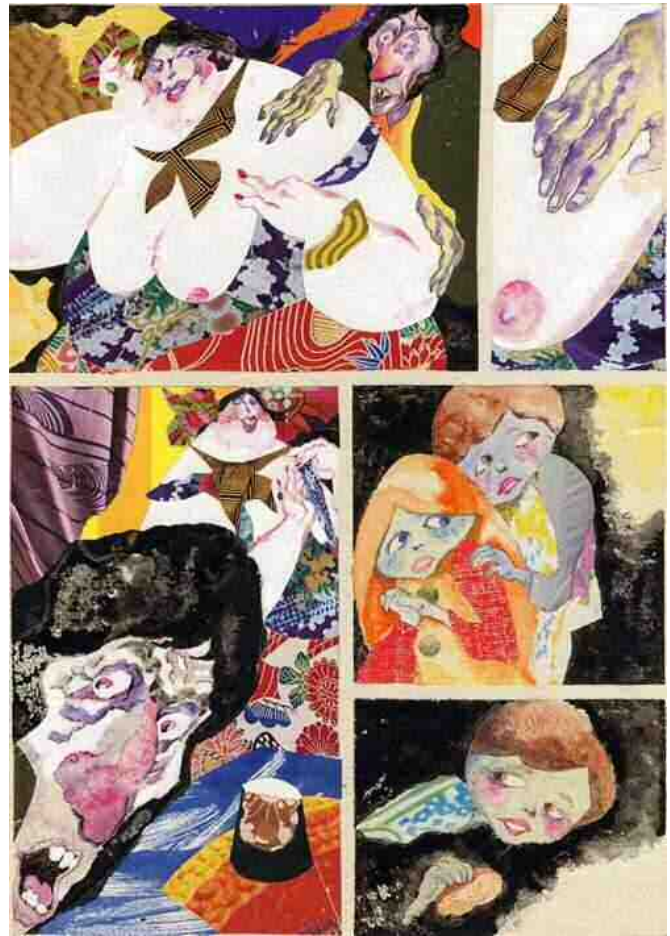


The panel above is from a page when Dracula is walking through town and peers into a room. We see here the image of torture akin to the atrocities that were reported in Argentina during the regime. In the foreground there is a bucket where body parts are thrown and it is labeled "Desperdicios" after the disappeared. This was published in 1984 just after the regime ended.

To draw, you have to use the tools that give the most convincing result. Each subject requires different graphic solutions, and these different graphic solutions require appropriate tools. This is the essence of drawing and cartooning.

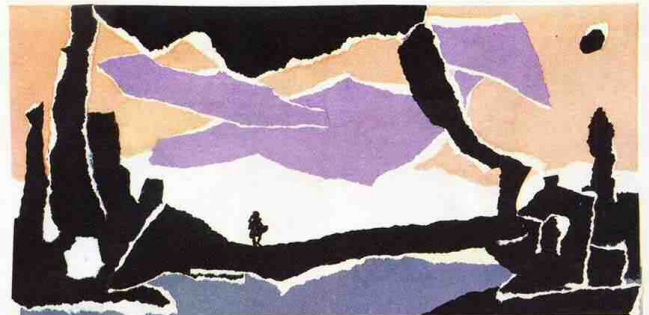
(Extracted from "Ombres et Lumières", Vertige Graphic, 1992)

Below is a page from *El Fin* and shows some interesting graphical techniques. The next several images are from *Chi*



Ha Paura delle Fiabe? (Who is Afraid of Fables?) In this work we have several retelling of fables with an adult theme. The first image is from *Hansel and Gretel* and demonstrates new color and texture in Breccia's work. This page reminds me of some of Sienkiewicz work on the Daredevil graphic novel. The second page is from *Little Red Riding Hood* which is made entirely of paper that are torn and placed to form images in a collage. The final image is from *Snow White* which features the Seven Dwarves who include Corto Maltese, Laurel and Hardy and the Yellow Kid. In addition to collage, Breccia used many unconventional tools to create art. There is a video online of Breccia drawing a self-portrait with ink on a razor blade. This same video shows him creating a page of artwork using multiple unconventional techniques and it is worthy of watching.

<https://vimeo.com/53462871>





For years I have made terrible efforts to forge my style and in the end I realized that this style is simply a label that serves no purpose. Drawing is a concept; it is not a mark [...] Why do I keep drawing in the same way? When I draw, I am always myself; I am merely changing the signs with which I express a concept. Having a personal style, this kind of seal of guarantee, is simply stopping at the point where one achieves success.

Perramus also deserves more attention. In addition to the artwork, we see themes haunting Breccia recurring in this work. **Perramus** is the story of a man who has let his companions of revolt die. Sick with guilt and regret, he enters a bar and is offered 3 prostitutes: Rosa, for luck; Maria, for pleasure; or Margarita, for forgetting. He chooses Margarita. He awakens with no memory and is dressed in clothing made from leftovers of all the Johns from around the world. He takes the name Perramus from a label inside his coat. In addition to obvious autobiographical themes, the book is about the recent



history of Argentina. Multiple themes are tackled and this can almost be seen as Breccia's Guernica. It is a sweeping overview of all the terrible times and events that Breccia witnessed first-hand. This is what Breccia has said about **Perramus**

The main reason for starting Perramus was the need to give testimony of everything that had happened in Argentina during the period of the military dictatorship, and it was my duty to do so. Was, and still is, my only weapon, and with this weapon, I protest, Perramus was a

breccia

cry of protest, a cry of revolt.

(Alberto Breccia in **Ombres et lumières**, Vertige Graphic, 1992)



This page features election posters suggesting that there is the illusion of choice. You can choose Yes or Yes but in the end you get the same, a feeling of helplessness.



I realized that with a weapon that might seem ridiculous, like a small brush, I could say very serious, very important things.



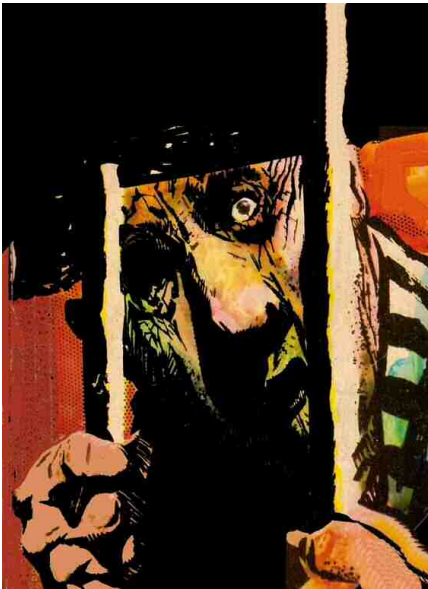
During the 70's and early 80's, Breccia lived in fear of persecution on a daily basis. While many artists fled Argentina, Breccia stayed. He used allegory and symbolism to continue to speak out in the only way he could. *Buscavidas*, published in 1981 which was still during the regime, is a cryptic and satirical view of life in Argentina under the dictatorship in the guise of a comical story. Partial page below, translation Ron Tiner.



breccia

On the topic of fear for his life during the transition years of the 70's and 80's, Breccia has said.

I was trying to keep drawing and avoiding problems. I had to do things that, at least in appearance, were "drinkable"... If one day they came to see me at home, I could always have said to them: "I am drawing a strange, a little comical story. A little grotesque". Perhaps that way I could give them a smile, and they would not kill me with a butt.



I was annihilated by this sensation of impotence. I wanted to draw something stronger, more engaged, without being able to do it. To do it was to sign my death warrant myself

It is also worth noting that much of Breccia's work was not initially commercially successful. Latino Imperato who knew Breccia well commented in a 2013 interview on this.

He was conscious of what he was doing, conscious that by thoroughly experimenting, trying different styles, he risked leaving a lot of people behind. He made the conservatism of the reader unwilling to accept the change the problems of publishers who, to guarantee their income, were more inclined to repeat formulas "that work" rather than proposing innovative authors.

*Once, returning from an appointment with a major publisher where he had been refused for the umpteenth time, on **Informe sobre ciegos** he was particularly in a bad mood. "That may be the best thing I've done," he said. "I cannot go any further. It's a good job, I know. I cannot understand why people say there is no public for that. As long as we continue to offer shit, the public does not risk evolving; to refine its tastes... I do not understand how one can sell tens of thousands of copies of comics so bad." He took in his hands a book by a successful French author which was sitting on the table. "Look!" He began to point out to me the rather gross faults in the drawing, the clumsiness in the cutting. Then he took a ballpoint pen and corrected the boxes: anatomy, perspective... everything went on. He was furious.*

The Final Years

Breccia kept working up until his death in 1993. His output had slowed and perhaps the most notable of the pieces from these years is *El Dorado* and *Informe sobre ciegos*, pages from both are below.



He is one of the few not to have taken refuge in a determined style in which he could feel comfortable. He ran the risks typical of the experimenters; one of these risks could even be failure. But Breccia was not afraid to fail because he did not consider himself an artist. He saw himself as a craftsman. The failures of the artists are shattering, the failures of the craftsmen, on the other hand, go unnoticed, they make no noise. Stopping to see yourself as an artist is a huge relief and brings a freedom to do what you want. This is, moreover, an ideology.

Carlos Nine on Breccia in an interview 2013



Partial page from *Historias con moraleja: El guapo, la muerte y el tango* (1991)

Conclusion and Afterthoughts

Finally I will share my *Viajero De Gris* page with you. It is from the end of a chapter and we can see the main character fading from his dream of war and carnage only to return to the reality of his captivity. In the final panel we see the prisoner reading from a comic. This page could certainly represent the life of Breccia with him living through the troubled times escaping through his art only to return and finding himself a prisoner. In the end, it is just a man and a comic book.



Alberto Breccia lived and worked almost his entire life in Buenos Aires. Living through some of the toughest times he found salvation and redemption through his art. He described his art as his only weapon. He escaped the poverty that was his birth right through art, he escaped oppression through his art and in the end he escapes being forgotten in death through his art. He leaves behind a legacy of some of the greatest and most important comics ever created. His work has and will continue to influence other creators. Like the ripple effect of a stone on a still pond, his influence will continue through those he influenced.

One of the more sobering thoughts I have had about the genius that is Alberto Breccia is that he was too, too far ahead of his time. He worked on foreign language comics with themes that were very personal which limited print runs and are therefore hard to find. As a result, he is shamefully unknown to most North American collectors and art fans. I hope this article inspires a few of you to know Breccia. Below are two self-portraits from the 1990s.

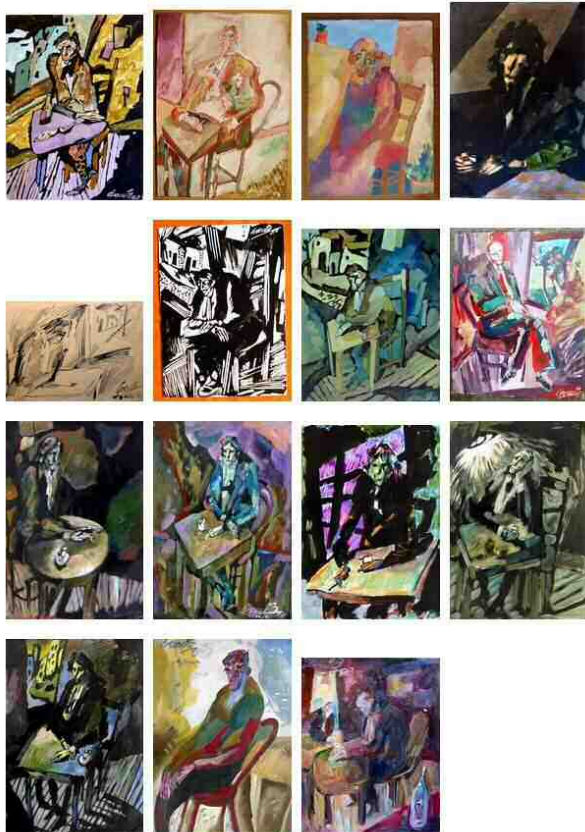


It would be remiss for me not to mention other art by Alberto Breccia outside of the comic field. This includes children's book illustrations, commercial work and fine art paintings. Here is a sampling of some of that work.



Recent exhibition of Breccia's illustration and cover work done for book industry.

Detailed pencil layouts/prelims for comic pages



Fine Art paintings by Alberto Breccia



Breccia's Children



Enrique Breccia – the most successful having done work for European and North American publishers. He uses a very detailed and sketchy style.



Patricia Breccia – her approach to comics is more in the independent and underground style.



Cristina Breccia – her art is more stylized and suited for book illustrations. She specializes in fairy tale illustration and figurine creations.



References:

Thankfully Breccia was well respected in his time. This left us with many interviews and videos of the man. Through his thoughts, opinions, demonstrations and body language, we get a peek into the man and the artist that is Breccia. Although most of these are in Spanish, Italian or French, there is a wealth of information available.

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I am very grateful for the knowledge, support and assistance of Fausto, Michele and Max in providing reference material, helping to guide the article and provide corrections.

Since having written this article a few months ago, I have added another page by Breccia to my collection. It is from the same chapter in *Viajero de Gris* as my other page. On this page, Breccia does use collage. The rocks are pages of original art/patterns done separately and then torn to make the rocks in the first panel. The rough edges of the tear are left and add to the overall texture and effect that was intended. This is a very dark and nearly abstract page using negative space and shapes.



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