

Breaking barriers

by July Casner

"LATIN American art" is a euphemism — it's Latin America's need to create an identity," says María Tereza Ruiz, a Latin American artist who "does not believe in looking."

Born in Argentina and raised in Colombia, the 30-year-old painter has assumed the Third World artist's traditional career path of going abroad — the new lives in New York. Having had the opportunity to see the center of the art world from the periphery, and the periphery from the center, she has come away with the theory that Latin American artists make their own ghosts abroad, proliferating what for her is a work of an art with inherent cultural characteristics.

Ruiz was invited to Buenos Aires by the San Martín Cultural Centre, where an individual exhibition of her paintings opened last Wednesday. The day before, closed in New York East Village club, and surrounded



• "Narciso I," 1986. Oil on canvas, by M.T. Ruiz.

by her paintings in a family apartment, the sensitive painter speaks about Latin American artists in New York in general and about her work in particular.

"People have a very pre-conceived idea about Latin Americans — not only in the United States, in Latin America as well. I believe that there's no such thing as a national art, nor a Latin American art, nor a European art, nor from anywhere," she said. "I think culture affects art but I don't think that it is mechanically reflected in art — it's much more complicated.

"In my case what's important is personal experience," she continued. "Where I am isn't so important because my art comes from me, it's very original. The place itself doesn't really affect me. It's the human experience."

Ruiz did not start painting seriously until she went to New York, in 1981. Stopping in that city on her way to Europe to study for a pos-



• "Two Around a Table," 1986. Oil on canvas, by M.T. Ruiz.

graduate degree in literature, she stayed, started painting and studied at the Arts Students League, Parsons School of Design and the New York Studio School.

In New York, she paints in a windowless studio. Her paintings, despite her warm, responsive, depression of human figures in everyday situations, demonstrate her feeling for human contact, which she says is the most important part of her experience wherever she may be. She doesn't say direct influence by her environment on her work, but she says some are quick to call it dominantly "Latin American."

If aware of her background, "There are people who look at my art and, if they know I'm Argentine, they say it's Latin American. But if they don't know I don't think they think that," she explained. "They say the colors transmit a feeling of a pueblo — I use a lot of green and red, primary colors, this gives it some thing tropical. But the City's main expressions use primary colors and their work can't be understood as tropical."

Ruiz says many Latin American artists in New York phrase themselves by sticking together in particular institutions known as venues for Latin American art.

"They think that if they're in a group they'll be able to break the profession of the New York market with respect to Latin Americans, and it's not like that," the painter said. "The barriers have been broken. There are artists who have had a lot of success but they've done it as individuals."

Just as Latin American artists are often stereotyped abroad, there is also a tendency in their native countries to believe that Hispanics are "beter" or better than those still living in their native land.

Ruiz says that obviously in a society like New York, there is more opportunity to make contacts, and to make a cultural statement. But she says that for her the main difference is access to materials, and better materials do not necessarily make one a "beter" artist.

"Quality cannot be automatically measured because an artist is in one place or another," said Argentine-Colombian-New Yorker Ruiz. "Nationality is not a determinant in the quality of a work of art."

'El Gran Federico'

FEDERICO Garcia Lorca. His Drawings. His Poetry. His Drawings. His Life. In other words, an homage to one of Spain's national treasures, now on at the Museum of Decorative Art.

The exhibition, based on 160 little-known works, shows drawings by the poet, done from 1920-35. The colored line drawings have a childlike quality — for the most part whimsical but at times showing a darker or more complex side of Lorca's imagination.

Visible are a series of

drawings, some surrealist investigations influenced by his friend Salvador Dalí, and a colorful series which reveals the work of Miró. The exhibition is very well put together, pleasant to pass through, with informative biographical panels and also including dedicated books, poems, photographs, resumes from productions of Lorca's works and texts — rightly concentrating on the lost Lorca rather than the myth of the drawings alone.

The exhibition was organized by the Federico Garcia

Lorca Foundation in Madrid, where the show was held, and some very dazzling photos of El Gran Federico Art last year. There are

reproductions and catalogues on sale, and some very dazzling photos of El Gran Federico Art (GC)

