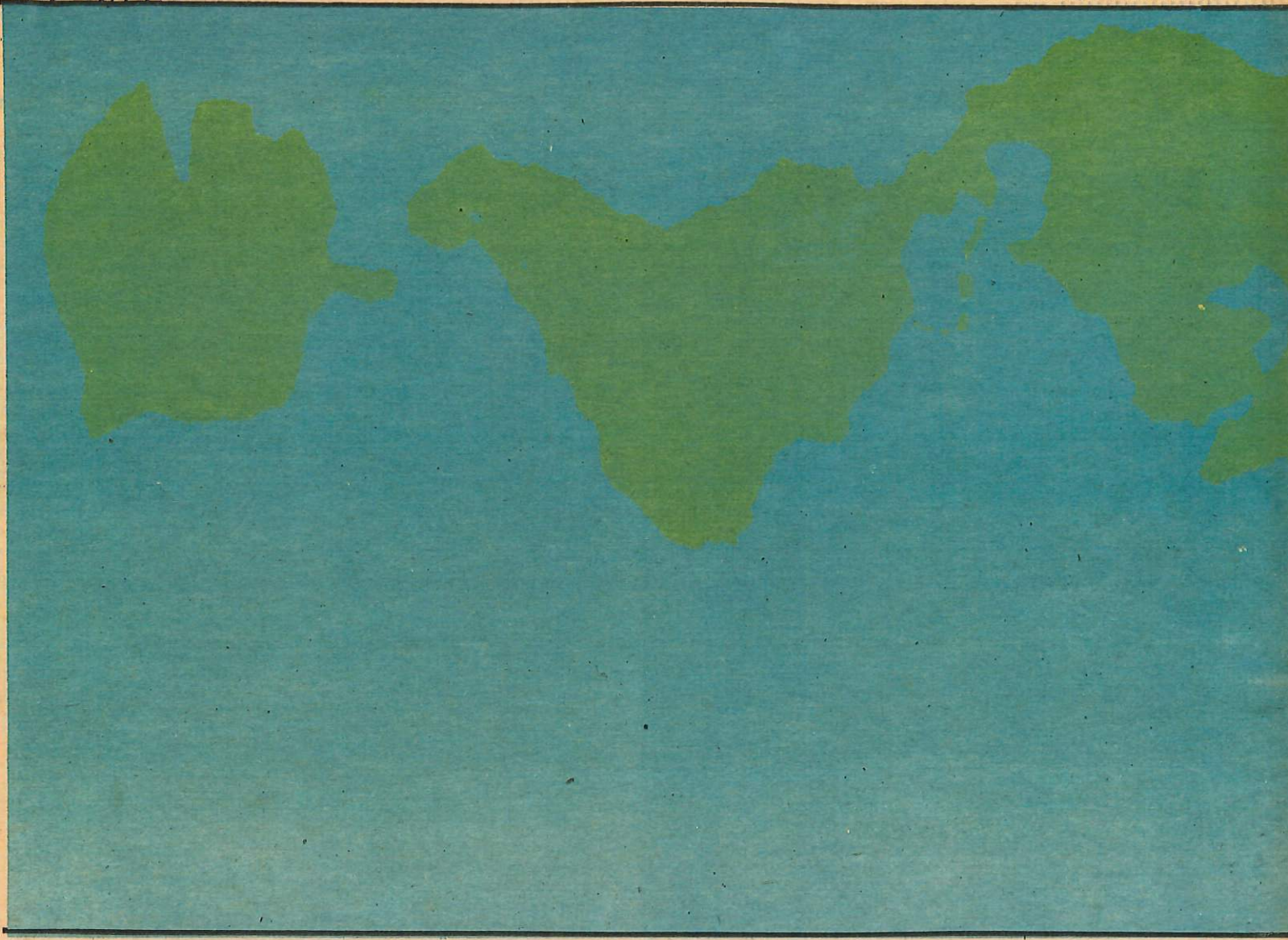




Views and Overview

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Quite a few exhibitions by artists from the states, Latin America and Spain have come to our island this past year. Except for Frasconi's, they have created few ripples among the artists, critics and public of Puerto Rico. We are learning to be the blase and sophisticated colonials. No wishy-washy art work gets our testimonial simply because it is metropolitan.

M. Chauvin may be at work in our insular hearts. Or else maybe we are now of age, assured of our taste and place in art, and less colonially tolerant. But maybe the various metropolises are extra-active with propaganda and goods for whatever purposes in our election year. We have to keep Marta Traba's teachings in mind, dutifully, lest we be colonized. She means it north-south. But we will be watchful all around: North-south, south-north, west-east and east-west, just in case.

In this connection, I am very busy investigating the Cubed-egg plot. Square eggs indeed. Adding culture's geometrical form to nature's beautiful egg shape, is very un-Puerto Rican in

spirit, artistic and political. But I am onto that dastardly CIA and WASP Republican design. Don't worry. And I will soon make my revelations. I have started to fast and I will abstain ere I start to reveal. I just not lest I lose the purity of spirit necessary for the job. Wait, dear readers, in all cleanliness and purity. My light shall come to your ears.

Puerto Rico this year itself is sending several colonizing art ambassadors abroad. Lorenzo Homar went to Colombia to help some Colombian artists produce a serigraphic project. Alfonso Arana is going to Mexico and Paris and Myrna Baez to South America to exhibit their paintings. Hernandez Cruz has been invited to show in various places. Also, many individual works including Colibri Gallery graphics will go out as our ambassadors to many lands.

The shows we received included the New York Museum of Modern Art's "Latin American Graphics," a third of which we thoroughly enjoyed; "Imagen de Nueva York," a variety show of Latin artists in the Big Apple; a retrospective exhibit of American Painting since 1900, which proved that abstract-expressionism did have

ancestors; and the two excellent Frasconi graphic shows.

Many styles, and countries including Cuba, Colombia, Mexico and Santo Domingo were present at the short-lived exhibit and auction of Latin American and Puerto Rican paintings and graphics given to help free our Nationalist prisoners in the states and many styles were present also at the specialized "photography in Graphics" show which came here from New York's Pratt Institute.

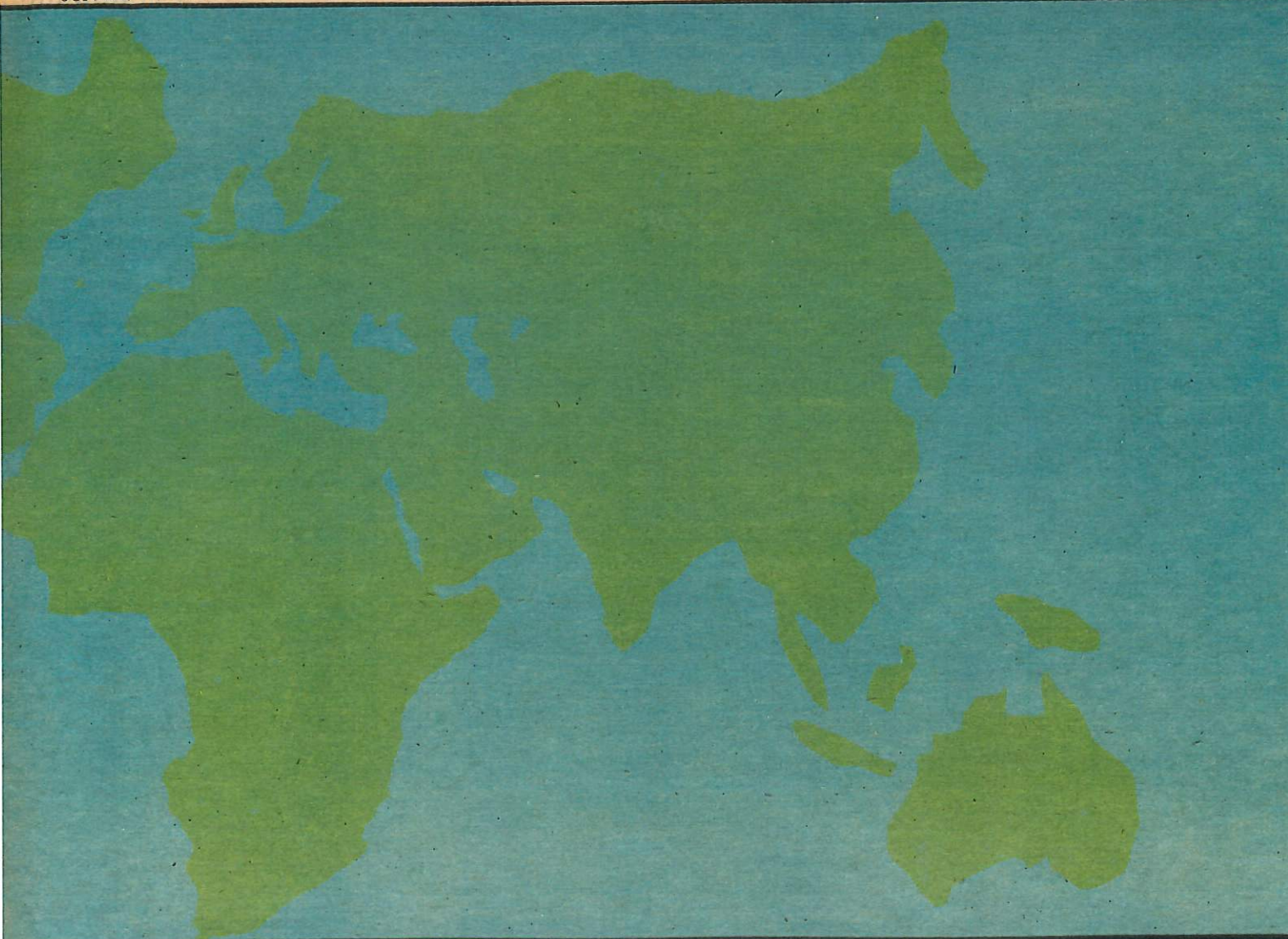
A good, though bombastically titled, exhibition, "Creators of Latin America," showed some very good paintings by Puerto Ricans and other Latins. Belonging to Puerto Rican private collectors, the works represent our consumer taste in such things. Private galleries such as Carlos Conde's Galéria las Americas and such official "importers" as the institute and the University of Puerto Rico have helped in this very important educational part of art commerce. We do buy some art sometimes or else we wouldn't get the offers we have had over the years, official or private. I notice graphics predominate.

The UPR Museum this year started a good program of lectures, concerts and art shows, even when handicap-

ped by lack of funds and disruptions by students. Curator Arturo Davila is at last in his forte and his prime. A historian with iconographic and palatial wisdom, he will help our UPR museum program. Davila got a commitment from Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for travelling art shows. In my mind they will nicely balance our normal "import line" from MOMA of New York. May Davila also open us a credit line in France, Mexico, England and other countries. Of course, official travelling shows are normally genteel and well-mannered, which is suspicious to us contraband-minded islanders. But I do wish Davila well.

I did want to love the first Spanish art show on the program. We all loved the Antonio Frasconi's woodcuts, which are still here, for their life-enhancing expressiveness, powerful economy of means and tactile impressiveness, though we viewed his philosophy of "duty to his work" as suspect philosophy. We contrabandist islanders hold that our duty is to maim himself, not to his artisan technology or specific political cosmology. Work is a biblical punishment.

With the above declared tastes, how could we love the dutiful drawings



vs in the Plastic Arts

and graphics by Spanish artists shown until last week at the institute. They are respectful artists. Theirs is respected work-but not to be prospected as an example for us. They look tired. They look as if they were work. Ay, bendito I did want to love them, if only for Picasso and Goya's sake.

When a student in Europe I was colonized by the multitude of Picasso's and Goya's originals and plates. I used to study them for months on end, marvel at the dexterity, the daring, the fulsome expressiveness, and yet the economy with which results were gotten by those two giant colonizers. So, as a proper and dutiful subservient colonial, I wanted to love the Spanish show. And it represented Spain in San Juan, an honor to us all, presented free of charge by the Spanish Ministry. Let me show good manners toward our guests. But I am a Spaniard too. I must protest.

What has happened to Spain? We colonials should take it over. They need help, new blood, new hope, especially in serigraphy but also in drawing. Luckily, they can use metal well. Witness Ignacio Berriobena's "The jump," Serra de Rivera's "The

Seducer" and "Interior with Painter." Nice etchings.

We cannot lend Spain our Homer because he is serigraphically busy helping colonize Colombia now. But we have countless ambassadors. They, unlike the seraphims, may speak a suspect Spanish, since ours is a roving-contrabandist tongue, but they know their serigraphy and they all love the señoritas, the idea of Mother Spain, the glory of the race and the bullfights. Once I had a similar assignment in Mexico, in 1956, to repay part of the Situados, and I didn't make any enemies for Puerto Rico, I hope.

We islanders can learn to colonize. We have to. It's our crossroads duty, our manifest destiny. Go east, west, north and south, young men of Puerto Rico.

As for Spain, we should not worry, she is true to herself, as usual. She always bred giants, in fact she bred a giant almost every century (Zurbaran, Greco, Velazquez, Goya and Picasso) then a desert in between when the giants' fame ate the lesser painters away. There is a similar cannibalism in Mexico by the Big Four muralists (Diego Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and Tamayo) as then-youngster Jose Luis

Cuevas complained in 1956. Next day he had to leave the country. Siqueiros was supposed to have searched for him carrying a machine gun inside his Mercedes Benz. About 12 Puerto Rican artists then visiting Mexico were amused. We had had a taste of art-power, Mexican style.

Jaime Mejia Servin, semi-officially representing Mexico exhibited at the Institute's Museum of Fine Arts until last week. He studied, exhibited and has won prizes in appropriate centers in Mexico and the United States and has works in various countries. I immediately liked his color. It is luminous. And he dares to use a contrasted tonal scale from blacks to saturated lights in his spatial exercises with planes, producing an urban landscape effect. Tactile values are poor in his work, however. He approaches painting through the color-seeing eye, not through the sense of touch.

But his spirit of forms is very derivative, including the use of saturated lights against darks and blacks. His is a play with planes much like Kupka's about 1912, at the so-called beginning of abstraction in modern art according to self-centered European sources and colonials. I have

seen displays of the geometric plane at least 25,000 years old. Amidst the Paleolithic bison you can see them. Some are decidedly rectangular, all of them quite tectonic. Engraved and painted both, they may suggest traps for the hunted prey, homes for its anima, or modern constructivism. More than 400,000 years ago, almost five times what carbon dating methods can date, but measured scientifically, shells were incised by man with serrated parallel lines forming linearly textured planes.

Also, 1,780,000 years ago, man produced his first architectonic circle of stones in Olduvai Gorge.

So for almost 2 million years man has been designing himself and his world. Sometimes he follows nature's curved forms and manners, sometimes he prefers culture's geometrical constructions, sometimes he combines both in a classical human synthesis. We are in the latter stage now in Puerto Rico.

Because in the late 60's our art works had too much geometry, they were farout to Marta Traba. She saw in them a colonial imprint, that I now see in Mejia's work. It is only a manner of speaking, Mejia.