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## ART

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT

Special to the Star

At the Ponce M

## DE ROMERO A

Ponce was once again the art capital of Puerto Rico last month when it opened an expressionistic art show better than most in San Juan, Arecibo and Mayaguez. I refer to the joint exhibit of paintings by Jesse De Romero and Esther Shelley at the Ponce Art Museum.

It was a pleasure to see the free-wheeling use of saturated color and the liberated sense of spatial relationships which both exhibiting artists demonstrate in their works. De Romero's paintings are decidedly expressionistic and free in execution, with lots of movement, music and color hitting the spectator's eye. Esther Shelley's works are under more rigorous control, with sober painterly greys serving as anvils for the resounding noise of small areas of rich color. A show alive, a pleasure to see, not absolute in quality, but, how pleasurable in credible vitality. A lark.

Most Puerto Rican art in the San Juan galleries is resolved with careful paso-fino-tonal gradations and limited colors with simple front-facing spatial divisions, most times symmetrical in distribution. De Romero and Shelley use the whole rainbow. They clang darks against lights in major tonal contrasts and forcibly order space around without a horror of empty spaces.

De Romero's spatialism whirls around, however, whereas Shelley's is constructed more rationally almost tectonically.

I welcome this exhibit by De Romero and Esther Shelley at the Ponce Art Museum. Their works swing, their colors sing, their spatial masses whirl, their tonal contrasts yell. And yet they are in reasonably full professional control, especially Shelley, though De Romero's works are more powerful. Sexy too.

A 1964 graduate of New York's High School of Music, and Art Jesse De Romero studied with all of us at UPR until 1967 then got his bachelor in fine arts degree at Pratt Institute in 1970 and pushed on to Mexico until 1972. He exhibited in all of the above centers and in such galleries as the San Francisco Museum, New York's Brata Gallery, the New York Coliseum, while still a student. Now he occupies himself with establishing his "own ABC's and vocabulary, right here in Puerto Rico."

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*"Canto Jibaro" by De Romero**"Retrato de Nina" by De Romero**"Don Theo" by De Romero**Jesse De Romero*

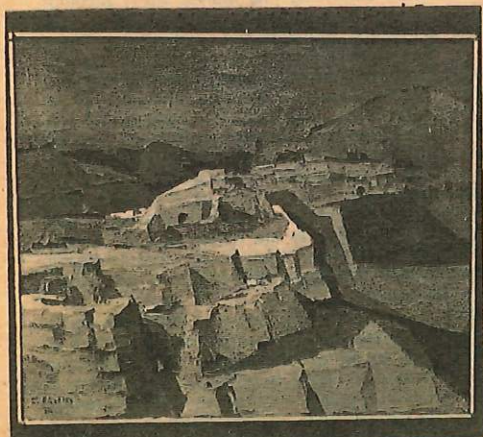


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# Museum of Art AND SHELLEY



"La Parguera at Dusk" by Shelley



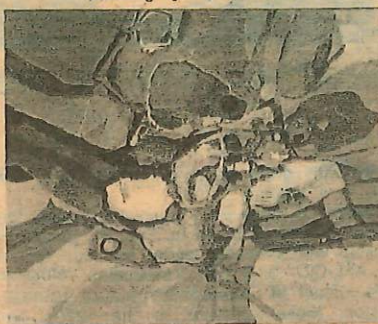
"A Quarry" by Shelley



"Autoretrato" by De Romero



"Bursting Spring" by Shelley



"Sky, Water and Earth I" by Shelley

In this show, Romero's "Music and Dance," a large diptych, is dominant with its swiftly painted large figures and musicians animated by whirling instruments and music signs. His "Elvira" is a strong pink erotic nude with some pop accords. His "Self Portrait" has a very tactile and dense yet explosive background in flux which dominates the portrait figure and is perhaps symptomatic of his present view on his development as a person. "Payaso Mikito" of Ponce is seen in an interesting sideways movement to the right, typical of his entry into stage action. "Canto Jibaro" is a loose orthodox salute to Puerto Rico social-realist painting. Some of his works are too loosely brushed for my taste.

Romero's primary colors, washed in strong transparencies, are weightless most of the time which can be dangerous for his development. But they do succeed in imparting vim and movement. I still prefer the intense gripping and moving quality of the background in his "Self Portrait." It's masterly. He should grow up to it in his future works.

Esther Shelley has lived in various countries in Europe, the Middle East and in the United States and, as a journalist, has traveled extensively.

In 1961, she came to settle in Puerto Rico with her family. Out of the blue she started to paint and later, picked up some instruction in summer art courses at Woodstock. She has exhibited here and in the states since her first show at the Ponce Art Museum in 1970.

She won first prize in oils at the Knickerbocher Artists Society in the National Arts Club in 1972 and 1974 and first prize in oils at the Westport, Conn., summer show in 1973.

In this exhibit I prefer her masterful "Quarry," done in pearly grays. More colored are her two "Sky, Water, Earth" very tactile compositions. Many of her landscapes are what I call "Orthodox American Academy" patterned subconsciously on Foster and Grumbacher "how to" books. But her colors and her compositions are better than those commercial traffickers, as seen in the crisp "San Juan Harbor" or "La Parguera at Dusk" or especially in "Yellow Sky." Planar simplifications with handsome color seem to be her birthright, though abstract expressionism seems to call her in her latest works.

The show will continue to mid-November.



Esther Shelley