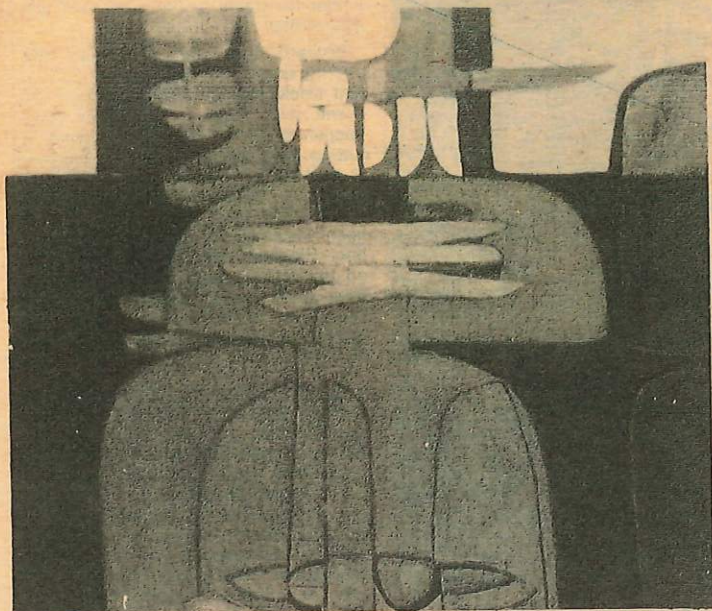


ART

*"Ritos y ceremonias" by Luis Hernandez Cruz*

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Puerto Rican sculptors and painters are not promoted here as a group. We owe very little to our government, to the Institute of Culture, the various universities or other island institutions. The graphic arts, the theater, music, and artisans of all kinds have their professional biennials, festivals and fairs, paid for by the government. We painters have the annual UNESCO Salon only, a private enterprise. Sculptors get nothing: they have to go it alone, like the architects. They have to present maquettes for competitions and sink or swim on the resultant possible orders.

Maybe that's the best possible arrangement for freedom. In our creative life we are free from imposed conditions. (Free to die in the market place: Isn't that an imposed condition?)

Individual painters and sculptors do find exhibition space. Beginners find plenty of contested exhibits to start a career, including the Ateneo competitions. Maybe that's all we should get. If the promoters and clients of painting and sculpture were only official government institutions or salons, we would suspect them all anyway.

The few times since 1951 we at the University of Puerto Rico tried to put up representative shows of Puerto Rican painting and sculpture. We got egg on our faces. Pickets, accusatory graphics, literal hatchet jobs, boycotts, and innuendos galore is what we got for our pains.

We haven't had good exhibits of

our "high" art since the Nueva Vida try under Luis Ferre in 1968. But the "Nueva Vida" title was suspect all along: it sounded like Ferre's political slogan and that may have decided inclusions and exclusions. Much more representative was the Casa Campeche "two centuries of Painting" exhibit, a private enterprise, therefore suspected of commercial motives. The show desperately tried to be reasonably representative and no absolutist value judgments were exercised by its selectors including Maria Rechany and Antonio Molina but he got the egg too.

We could say we do not have an official annual salon with prizes because the government, the institutions, the historians and jurors concerned are afraid of the possibly expletive-expressive results. Such shows boil over in Puerto Rico. Better not to light the cauldron every year. Notice what happened even to the biennial. Prints are supposed to be less personal than paintings, more "technique" oriented, and yet the biennial blew up.

But maybe the real fear is our fear to see ourselves as we are, to face our art and our history as it is and as it has been. Maybe as a people we are not proud of our "high art" so we don't show it. Maybe as sophisticates we suspect it is colonial and not Puerto Rican enough — so we don't show it. We suspect critics and historians because they decide who and what is "good" and "historical" as if that were important or possible.

First Prize

UNESCO

Third Annual Salon

Some Entries

So we abstain from letting them know our art as a group.

The tragedy of it is that our work isn't all that insular or colonial or poor. Even if it were, what the hell? That's what we produce, let's face it. Let the historians come and go as they please, we can always create our personal myths which could become history. That would be the adult solution, dear Alice and Juan in wonderland. Let's you and I start.

XXX

The above thoughts were suggested by the painting entries submitted to the Third Unesco Salon. None is excellent-but many are quite good! The salon itself is kept alive in our midst mostly because of the hardy efforts of art critic Antonio Molina. "This country needs a yearly salon. We will help produce it," he told me years ago.

It didn't matter that I told him salons and biennials are antediluvian monsters which didn't even pick out the real historical winners or great artists of their own time in the past. "But they are useful inventory show cases," he said. He tried several ways, and failed.

Then since 1974 he hit on Unesco as a call-card, on the UPR Exhibition Hall as the premises, and on the Martinez Canas Latin American Art Foundation as the financial resource. Martinez Canas grants the single \$1,000 prize plus such expenses as this year's fare for two jurors from Washington and Miami.

Martinez believes in directing the use of some of the tax moneys he

would have to pay to the government otherwise. "I lose the first 3 per cent of my adjusted gross income. After that, the government allows me to give tax free from 3 to 15 per cent of my gross to worthy art or social causes such as this salon. Beyond 15 per cent, I could give more away tax free but only to universities." I wish more of our businessmen would follow his example.

The selection jury of this 1976 Salon consisted of Francisco Barrenechea, Antonio Molina and myself. The prize jurors were Jose Gomez Sicre, head of the visual arts section of the Office of American States in Washington D.C.; Arnold Lehman, head of Miami's Metropolitan Museum of Art; Carmen Tuya, head of visual arts of the P.R. Department of Education; Antonio Molina and myself. Old warriors all; quite eclectic as a jury.

Since I think we worked quite intelligently and smoothly, and since it may help our students and other salon "entrepreneurs" in the future, my critique of the Salon shall be an exposition of how the two juries worked. It isn't an orthodox procedure; I hope the other jurors don't mind my invasion of their ethical space. But I am a pedagogue. Why and how things happened are of more interest to me than enunciating absolute value judgments, which are relatively silly in art anyway.

I have already said that many works submitted to the show were quite good, but none was excellent. Typical of Puerto Rican art. Also typical was the prevalent eclecticism: work styles

GALLERIES

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL

Carnegie Library
Ponce de Leon Ave., Stop 1
Puerta de Tierra 724-1046
Current show: Ceramics and graphics by Rolando Gutierrez

CASA DEL LIBRO

255 Calle del Cristo 723-0354
Open Mon. to Fri. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat. 2 to 5 p.m.

GALERIA BOTELLO

208 Cristo St. 723-2879 Open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Closed Sun. Oils, graphic, acrylics, sculpture and Santos. Work of Latin-American Artists.

GALERIAS DE LAS AMERICAS

152 Fortaleza Street 723-5787-25-1455. Open
Tues. to Sat. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Paintings by John P. Stewart

GALERIA COABEY

Calle San Sebastian 101
Graphics, Drawings and sculpture.
Current show: Graphics by Taller Otoqui.

GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL 900

Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce. 725-2617 open
9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. "Tribute to Puerto Rico's Artisans" by photographers Ramon Aboy and Hector Mendez Caratini.

GALERIA DE LA CASA CAMPECHE

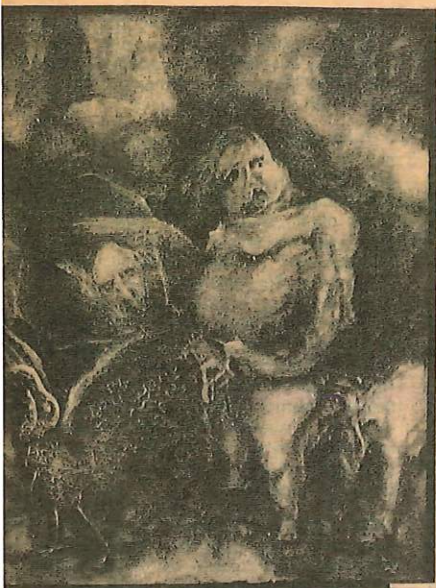
200 Calle San Sebastian Open Tues. to Sat. 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Current show: Engravings and water-colors by Suenos (Carlos Ortiz)

GALERIA GUARAGUAO

Callejon de la Capilla, Off San Francisco
Current show: "Exposicion colectiva de puertorriquena"

GALERIA MARIA RECHANY

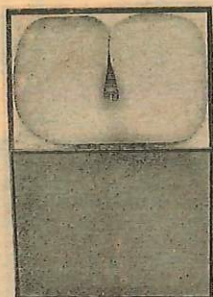
Magdalena 1363 Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon. to



"Homenaje a Goya" by Rene Santos.



"Sin lagrimas para regar el polvo" by Antonio Alvarez Suarez



"Presencia organica" by Lope Max Diaz.



"Rosina y Mimi" by Gamelin Rodriguez.

ranged from tardy impressionism and realism to extreme social realism through constructivism, surrealism, abstract expressionism, informalism, op and pop variants, hard-edged minimalismo, plus even "goyesqueries," oriental influences and hyper-realism. If we are a colony, only God knows who colonized us when. Our work styles are a resume of art history since the time of Cezanne. New York, Paris, Tokio, New Delhi and London are copying our present styles. Who pays tribute? To whom?

In some paintings, more than one style was at work which is really too eclectic.

Such is in the case of Jaime Suarez, who does semi-abstract constructivism with free informal textures and grey photo colors. Myrna Rodriguez presented an ambiguous abstract expressionist sketch to be hung as a conceptual hanging-flag-piece. 'She wants to do away with museum gallery walls. But she forgot to arrange for a proper spatial hanging procedure so her work wasn't accepted. Many such hybrid works are too intellectual for us proper "saloniers" and even act as flags in front of us "bulls." Who is the policeman in such cases? It should be the artist. Try again, Myrna.

I specifically miss semi-surreal work by "Montesinos" done with pretty saturated yet melodious colors; quite unusual for Puerto Rico. It was very small and was supposed to hang in the show but did not. Such things happen with unorthodox works. They

do not hang up with the bulkier orthodox pieces such as Jim Shine's. Shine's work wasn't supposed to hang in the principal hall but then its size was needed to balance a wall so there it is. The public and students should understand the pressures on those who have to put up an art-show overnight and on a Tuesday. This circumstantiality is another argument against absolute value judgments in art.

The show was hung quite handsomely by the time the prize jury met on Wednesday, the day of the opening. As a proper colonial I did wish then that Julio Rosado, Augusto Marin, Cundo Bermudez, Francisco Rodon and Carlos R. Rivera had sent works (as most have done before) and for the benefit of the two jurors from afar. But again, there is no absolute guarantee the show would have seemed any better in their eyes.

Relativity is shown also by the "neo-neo-Indian" work presented by Luis Hernandez Cruz, which ended up winning first prize. Out of all the works in his important recent institute show he had to choose that one. He himself admits he was surprised at how the colors of the work died when he saw it hung up in the museum exhibition hall. The hall has a cool fluorescent bluish lighting (Please note, Director Arturo Davila). Lights at the Institute Halls are yellowish because incandescent, which also is not ideal for painting (Please note, Director Luis Rodriguez). End result: the blues in Hernandez Cruz's painting were beautifully greyed at the

institute but too saturated with blue at the university. The reds were orangy at the institute, but purplish at the university. So all we had left was a nice powerful, yet too simple, totemic front-facing composition. Normal Puerto Rican even to its limited color. He had had better works at the institute show.

After the prize jury first walked around the hall we had a first informal verbal poll, at around 3 in the afternoon. About 12 paintings were mentioned by the five jurors which proves that no painting was excellent but many were good. Even then Hernandez Cruz had three first place winning votes, with Paul Camacho coming in after Hernandez.

The jurors were then asked to mark four or five ordered choices each on a piece of paper: 20 to 25 choices in all. If each had stuck to the 12 original selections as could happen, we might have needed many polls with in-between "convictive harangues." Once, with Jose A. Torres Martinez and Damian Bayon at the Ateneo, we felt each juror had to explain to the others how he felt about each selected picture. Very dutifully we did-so. It took us two days to arrive at a verdict. Even then the Ateneo was picketed and Larry Homar engraved his "Laudo Kilometrico" graphic against us.

This time it took us less than an hour in relative silence to order our candidates. When the possibilities were quickly tabulated, Hernandez Cruz was ahead, with 3 firsts, 1 second, 1 third (mine); Paul Camacho

with 1 first, 2 seconds, 1 third and 1 fourth; Jaime Suarez with 2 thirds and 2 fourths; Raul Zayas with 1 first (mine) and 2 fourths. Thus were decided the cash prize and the 3 honorable "second prizes."

Both Dr. Lenman and myself then allowed that our first choices be added to Hernandez Cruz to make the \$1,000 cash prize unanimous. It was then 4 P.M. I opened up a little piece of paper on which Martinez Canas had put his single candidate long beforehand, at my request and as a joke: he had voted for Hernandez Cruz. He pre-guessed us, as on another previous occasion.

Listed twice by the jury were Noemi Ruiz and Oscar Mestey. One mention each went to the works by Lope Max, Carola Vega, Rosita Haeussler, Agustin Fernandez, Esther Shelley, Betsy Padin and Delta Pico.

I hope the public plays juror when they come to the show. There are some other worthy works such as John Balossi's crisp and elegant visiting card, Rebecca Castrillo's beautiful greens and textures, Angel L. Rodriguez's striking "pompiere" portrait, Ruben Miranda's still too lineal but vigorous work and so on. Do play jurors.

At the opening hour, on receiving his first prize, Hernandez Cruz gallantly conceded that many students and others in the show could have won it, which is quite true. Hernandez has been panned expressionistically by art critics yet continues winning prizes and exhibits, both here and abroad. Quite a subjective world!

Sat. 725-4828. Paintings, and prints by Puerto Rican artists.

GALERIA GUATIBIRI

Gonzalez and Gandara Sts., Santa Rita, Rio Piedras.
Current show: "Primera exposicion del Club de Grabado"

MUSEO DE LA FUNDACION

Behind Tapia Theater, Plaza Colon 725-5962.
Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mon. Indian Artifacts and sculpture.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

Instituto de Cultura 253 Cristo St. 723-2320.
Open every day 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oils, prints and graphics.

Current show: "Mixografias", Mixed Graphics by Taller Grafica of Mexico and "El Mestizaje Racial en la Pintura Colonial Americana"

MUSEO DEL GRABADO LATINOAMERICANO

casa de los Contrafuertes. 101 San Sebastian St., Plaza San Jose second floor. Open every day from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Current show: Panamerican Graphics

MUSEO DE LOS SANTOS

Instituto de Cultura, Casa de los contrafuertes, Plaza San Jose. Open every day 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

MUSEO DEL CONVENTO DE SANTO DOMINGO

Instituto de Cultura. Open every day 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Corner Cristo and Norzagaray. Plaza San Jose, 724-0700, 724-0702.
Current Show: "30 Years of Sculpture by Jose Buscaglia"

PONCE MUSEUM OF ART

Las Americas Ave. 842-6215. Open Wed. to Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sun. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mon. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Paintings by Stephen Csoka

SALON ISABEL II

City Hall. Open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

UPR MUSEUM

University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. 764-0000 Ext. 2452 or 2456. Open daily 10 to 5.
Current Exhibition: Third Unesco salon.