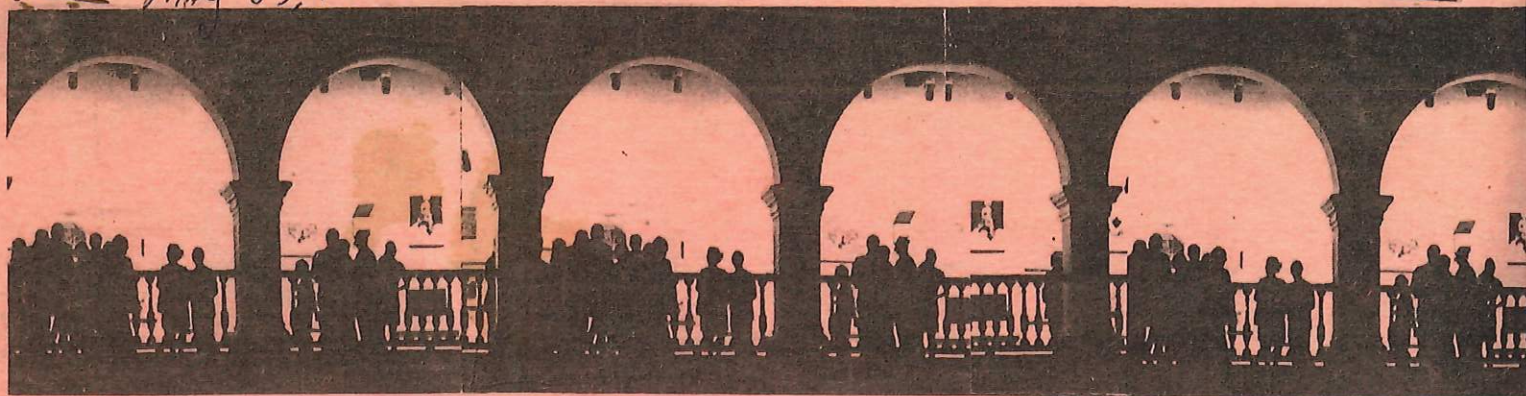


6 — May 23, 1976



The Biennial: The Hope

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

A third force consisting of young artists and students in love with the Biennial Bride and a neutral mediating Godfather, the Art Students League of Puerto Rico, have entered the stage of the still in-process, Fourth Biennial of Latin and Caribbean Graphics.

The May 28 date initially set for the wedding or inauguration may be postponed, depending on how soon the godfatherly league can get a commitment from the staid, huffy parent of the bride, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. Also depending on how soon the League can gather \$20,000 in an austerity year, to put up instead of Bicentennial Sam's red-white-and-blue portion of the bride's dowry.

Asked about the non-use of his money, Sam is supposed to have said ruefully, "First time my money is thus returned. I guess the biennial is a Soul thing, a strictly Latin thing with the Puerto Ricans, unlike many other insular programs where my money is welcome, including boycotters' salaries. The bride is a shapely lass, umm! I would have liked a kiss. It is my lot to gain enemies everytime I do favors for friends." (He is a worldly man.)

As for the Bride herself, she is weeping her heart out inside a Santo Domingo Convent cell. Almost 500 art works are strewn around the place, some of them quite good, many fillers of space. She says the news of her death is exaggerated since she is still alive in the minds of so many of us, the public, her Bridegroom.

To get the Bride out of the convent cell some young warriors of the Third Force in various meetings last week spoke of scaling convent walls, but wisdom prevailed. The walls are smoothly plastered, anyway; Father Institute knows its restoration stuff. Besides, it was decided that the art works are personal properties entrusted to the institute by absent artists and we respect private property.

A more Puerto Ricanish solution to the biennial convolutions (since revolutions have so many involutions when we islanders design them), is being developed by the Art Students League of Puerto Rico. All 13 directors of the league are behind Norman M. Hopgood, the league founder, in his efforts to get the biennial liberated. In the meeting on Friday, May 14 with many artists, including the sulky boycotters, vibrations were alpha.

Alpha too were meetings held with

Institute Director Luis Rodriguez Morales before and after the artists' Friday meeting. The institute's commitment can't be guaranteed until its board of directors meets (Enrique Laguerre, Carlos Conde, Carlos Sanz, Jesus Sanroma, Amelia Gozman de Paniagua and Milton Rua). Such distinguished great godfathers of the Biennial had initially adduced non-executive power in connection with the Bicentennial-biennial hassle but when the virginal purity of the Bride was tainted by political colors, they came out for political virginity first and ordered the execution of the darling Bride. Nobody can accuse them of being tainted.

In our paternalistic macho society, and especially this year, everybody has to be in favor of fatherhood, proper motherhood and virginal purity — ecumenics aside, universalism aside, human completeness aside, indivisibility of being aside. But I am deeply convinced that such distinguished fathers do love the Biennial Bride. They will do honor to the Latin father image, stern but loving.

Actually, everybody was always in

favor of and in love with the Bride. It's just that some lime-lighters want her for other loves than art. Such love fantasies are insulting to any healthy bride. From Cuba patriot Jose Marti sent us a telegram from the grave, "The Puerto Rico biennial is an altar, not a pedestal, (La patria es ara, no pedestal). Boycotting artists Lorenzo Homar and Carlos Irizarry happen to be our men in Havana at this moment. They are reported to represent Puerto Rico at the Latin American Plastic Arts Encounter in Cuba's House of the Americas. Since they are very patriotic, I imagine they will thank Marti for the grave telegram.

While all the above encounters and meetings between "cocorocos" were going on last week many artists and art students went around collecting signatures respectfully asking that the biennial be held, especially if non-Bicentennial as now. It is for these young artists that the biennial is important. Professional boycotters and other older artists have been formed already as artists. They don't need the biennial except as a pedestal or a

cash box or a public relations gimmick. But the younger artists need it as a target to shoot at, a meter to measure themselves by. It is they and the public at large who are the real biennial Bridegroom.

If I were an Institute of Culture director it is to this Third Force I'd listen from now on in connection with biennial destinies. We elders have had it, as I shall sing out almost in rhyme.

Listen to the young of heart of all political parties — members of the Third Force — as they go about gathering signatures:

"The biennial has been mishandled from the beginning due to the paternalistic holier-than-thou it's-good-for-them-we-shall-handle-it attitude of sacrosanct institutions. Then it was spoiled by aging revolutionists who wanted to use it as a pedestal for themselves and their personal tone of politics. Each thing has its place within the big picture, each element is important for the whole picture. But we have to form ourselves, first. The biennial helps, yet here we are wasting time, maybe, collecting signatures to demand our birth-right, the biennial when we should be working on newer and better art works."

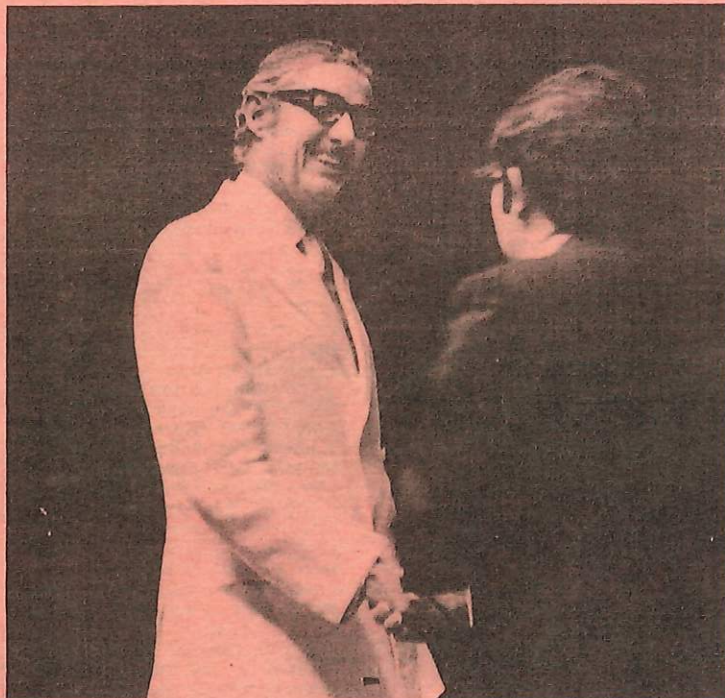
Besides the desires of the Third Force as expressed above, an important consideration which should weigh also with the Institute's board of directors and with Rodriguez Morales is that they have to account for \$35,000 worth of biennial money entrusted to them by Puerto Rico legislators. They can't throw the government money away in unfinished business. Somebody in the Comptroller's Office told me it's very difficult to account for such losses in such unconcluded cases. Besides, you can't easily transfer the money to other activities, that is, whatever is left of the \$35,000.

To conclude, the biennial is not quite dead. Let us keep praying. But if it dies, it will decidedly be the most important biennial we have ever had. As Sherlock Holmes said "What did not happen is the most important thing that happened that night. The dogs did not bark. That's what happened."

Or words to that effect.

Let's now study the possible definition of such portents.

In previous articles I have tried to establish that Puerto Ricanness in Art is insular, not necessarily insulated, and that insular is beautiful at least to us. Also that smallness in scale though not of heart, plus eclectic contrabandism, 360 degree vision and



Norman Hopgood, head of the Art Students League, who with the help of a Third Force group of artists and the league, is trying to reach a solution that will save the biennial.



Is Hopgood

a lack of docility are insular too, therefore beautiful, naturally. Now we have to enter into virginity: is our Puerto Ricanness virginal? Should the fourth Biennial of Latin Graphics be a virgin bride, pure art with no politics?

VIRGINAL: *adj.* Virgin, esp. maidenly; modest; pure. (Remember this includes ethnic and other purities!)

VIRGINAL: *n.* (C.F. *virginale*—prob. so called from being used by young girls or virgins). A small rectangular spinet without legs (a spinet is an obsolete small form of harpsichord). V.I.: To tap with the fingers as if on a virginal.

In other words, we have to decide whether to accept the Institute of Culture's implied definition of our art and culture as-maidenly-modest-pure (tapping our fingers on virginalia) or else accept our island's conditions as an eclectic contrabandist haven with no modest maiden around and with politics used as an "adobo" for every dish we taste, as long as the taste is "illegadero" or passable.

All islands tend to be whores in the sense that they are open to all mariners coming from 360 degrees around the clock. Puerto Rico is a strategically situated island masterful in contraband play, and contrabandists need expert useful complete women, not virgins.

Nature is the biggest whore of all and we are a natural people except when wrapped up in special banners, banners such as the institute carries now, the banner of esthetic purity. Under such a banner no politics and other trimmings or seasonings can enter or get mixed up with institute or island arts-and-culture. Let's define culture, art and politics:

Culture is whatever we "cult" or value in our insular life of human juices and ideals. It includes "culting" of good and bad manners also disposing of garbage, politics and art. Even smells and strikes are cultural manifestations.

Art is compressed-expressed life. For its shaping the willful artist will use whatever materials are at hand including garbage and politics provided the effect desired is the enhancement of life, not its abortive death for the sake of death. Let those who kill biennials look into their souls. Thanatos, (the death instinct) not Eros, (love) is guiding them.

Politics is the art of judging and doing in a nation such as ours whatever is possible to do in a particular moment and place (including the Institute) with whomever and whatever is available (including art) provided

the common good and peace are enhanced. Killing a biennial may bring peace of mind to some but not to the public at large.

Under the institute's banner, the above definitions would be suspect. No garbage or political seasonings are allowed in "Convent Hall Culture." Virginal Puerto Ricanness implies eternal cautiousness. Not even fear is involved (that would be redeeming) simply caution.

How can we tie the above cautious banner of Puerto Ricanness to the contrabandist freedom of spirit which I also take for granted in my people?

The answer lies in the kind of man plus the kind of cloak a man wears in Puerto Rico in such hallowed grounds as "the institute." "Hush! That's the Institute, don't you know? Hush, that's the Ateneo, don't you

know? How warmly they discuss the Ateneo presidency! Very literate. Hush! That's the faculty of the University of Puerto Rico. Their chancellor is reading his annual message. Hush! He is reading the printed word to them. We had readers like that in the cigar factory. They used to read to us while we made cigars. But father, what are the professors doing while they listen? Can't they read on their own in their home? Hush! Don't ask such disrespectful questions! Are you from Fupri?"

On hallowed grounds Puerto Ricans are cautious. They put the gods and the public on so that the gods and political devils do not strike them. Thus Rodriguez Morales and the institute board cautioned the biennial away. But caution isn't working today.

Thus we have cautious-incautious decisions at the institute. The Ateneo gives birth to another Ateneo in public. The faculties of the university don't meet with the chancellors anymore (to the chagrin of those of us who enjoyed taking occasional ritualistic pot shots at the Establishment). It's deliciously like Puerto Rico.

When hallowed institutions grow too big in Puerto Rico, we shall cut them down to our sense of small scale. Small is beautiful and more hallowed than big. The biennial was getting to be too big, the Ateneo grew too fast, the University faculty is multiversity big. Mow'em down! To our sense of scale!

As long as it is tolerably political, not too political, everything goes in Puerto Rico.

Idea for an Operetta

(Idea for an operetta now in process. Music: Francis Schwartz and piragua vendors?)

The biennial Bride is only four seasons old but fully developed, like Venus. In these modern times she flirts with the bachelors, some of them interestingly mature and politically minded artists. She is a political creature herself since politicians feed her from the Legislature and her father has accepted dowry money from Bicentennial Sam.

Her bachelors begin to shape the Bride in their own image, since all artists have that creative-god hangup. They try to woo her away from "that fellow Sam." In their eagerness they discuss her private political affairs with strangers, all over including down in Colombia, South America, and other public places.

"That's indecent," Papacito executive-director cries. "Unhand the biennial! She is virginal! All biennials have to be virginal!"

"We will strike this convent," cry the bachelors. "Hand her over!"

"Better an unwed, even dead, than an unchaste biennial!"

INTERMISSION

Pater Director goes to powwow with the very deep voiced and important Directorial Board of the Institute. (Sacramental music). "Do not bother us with earthly woes we are now communicating with God."

"But those bachelors are propositioning my child. I suspect the worst."

"The worst? The worst? Is she all abstracted?"

"Ah, woe! Ah, woe! Her best has been subtracted!"

"Not virginal?" (Tremolo music.)

"Not virginal! (The orchestra falls down.)

"But we will be tainted, we the untainted, if she is tainted. We the non-executive-untainted will be tainted. Close the biennial now!" (Lightning bolts strike. Warpath Chants and dances. Piraguero singing.)

INTERMISSION

Pater Director to Biennial Bride: "Get thee to the nunnery. There will be no biennial wedding! Weddings have to be apolitical!"

The Bachelors: "But that is a political decision and we need a platform for reporting this eviction! Vindictive! Edictive! Conflictive! Inflictive!" (Shower of letters newspapers and confetti)

INTERMISSION

Third Force young artist to another: "Sign this letter asking for the biennial. Help us liberate her."

"Who?"

"The biennial, the non-Bicentennial biennial. She is crying, we are all crying, because the institute is denying what the estate was gladly supplying: our Bride."

"I'd just rather climb the wall that holds her fast. Let's carry her away tonight."

"The walls are smooth and steep. Let's be sweet and we won't weep. Sign this letter and be hip."

"O.K. Long live the Bridel Who is that gentleman with 13 companions?"

"That's Hogood and the Art Student League Directors seeking bail."

"Aha! We are forging wondrous projections. Maybe there's hope for the Bride if we continue at attention. Hail to the hale! Hail to the hale! Hail to the Bride and the hale!"

(A long line of expectant figures sits and waits patiently, eating piraguas. The piragueros sing flamenco ballads.)

TEMPORARY CURTAIN