

ART

Creators of Latin America

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Special to the STAR

The trouble with the present show at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Center is its title.

"Creators of Latin America."

No kidding. "Creators of Latin America." I came expecting wonders. Bolivar created only part of Latin America; Washington created only one of various United States in the two Americas.

What do I find?

A nice, humble, yet reasonably important show of what Puerto Rico collectors have been able to buy of contemporary Latin American art plus some random Puerto Rican contemporary entries. A show, not as thorough, but parallel in intent with the recent, very important UPR Museum exposition of Latin American and Puerto Rican paintings of Colonial times, up to our Campeche. The UPR Museum plans a 19th Century similar event featuring our Oller then later, a 20th Century show. It is high time we Puerto Ricans took stock of how we measure up to other Latins. We don't normally appear in their art histories, yet for more than two centuries our best works were as good as any of theirs.

The trouble with most such shows is that they come like silent ships at night. They are whipped up on short notice, open with no real publicity or catalogs, and then are gone. However, the ex-post-factor printed and illustrated catalogs of the UPR Colonial exhibition will soon come out. The exhibit served as a gathering place for the works to be studied and photographed properly. That's something. We need bibliographical growth on subjects besides poetry, short stories and socio-economic essays. Otherwise art exhibits are fatuous social exercises.

The current exhibit of some 40 samples of Latin American and Puerto

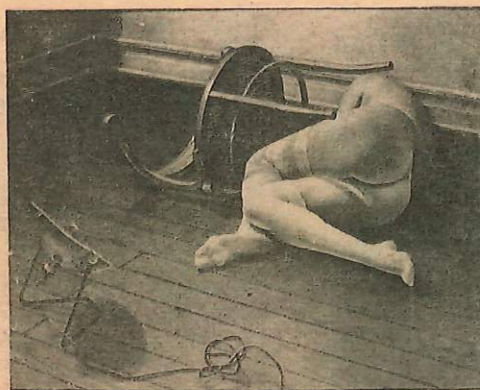
Rican paintings and graphics is open until the 25th of June, 24 hours a day (how convenient) and occupies an ample handsome "exhibition corridor" on the second floor of the UPR Medical "campus" building.

The catalog to the present show is incomplete: its two mimeographed pages listing 37 works when I counted 45. Besides, the names of most of the Puerto Rico collectors who graciously lent the works are missing from the "list". A few are presented on tags next to some works. But the tags and numbers keep falling down and some have been swept away by "medical" janitors. If the omission of the lender's names is their very own desire, hallelujah! Maybe we are breeding a very noble (or else very private) kind of collector. Not having the itemizing numbers is more annoying.

The exhibit is reasonably well-lit except late in the afternoon when direct sunlight creates havoc with some of the shiny paintings on display. These should hang on the side walls, not on the wall facing the sunlit windows.

Even thus handicapped, Julio Rosado del Valle's two paintings look handsome anyway. His "Girl with an Umbrella" is a colorful rhythmic masterpiece which has aged reasonably well except for uneven darks with varnish shine. It stands up to anything in the show. Julio's other oil, without title, is a loose piece of the 60's — a very texturology, sober in tonal-play and color.

Next to Julio's two oils is Eduardo MacEntyre's non-shiny acrylic, "Variant II," one of his better originals. Matt surfaced, its various blues gain under the strong light, especially when offset by discreet touches of complementary yellows. The work suggests cosmic mathematical constructs. A pity that nowadays MacEntyre continues this serial research in a



"Nude with Chair" by Dario Morales



"Head of a Mastiff Dog" by Siqueiros



"Girl with Umbrella" by Julio Rosado del Valle



"Utopia of a Man Who" by Siqueiros

thousand episodes using serigraphy, as noted in the "MOMA Latin Graphics" exhibition. The Moma show at the UPR Museum Hall nicely complements this exhibit, and would have complemented our postponed but not necessarily dead 1976 Biennial of Latin Graphics.

Is the present show at the Medical Center being properly cataloged and photographed? It's much too random to be definitive but some of the works could go to the future 20th Century event at the UPR Museum.

Not presentable for such use would be such items as Zuniga's drawing, "Market Women," the likes of which our Rafael Tufino could have produced wholesale while a student in Mexico; or Eligio Pichardo's helter skelter poetic pastel, so vaguely "tired-surreal" it doesn't bother to have a title; or Carlos Meridas textile design, a painting titled "Cortege of Princes;" or Augusto Marin's "Sisiphus," a painting which looks affectedly tired after so many climbs up the mountain. Marin is much better than that, though I wish he would use the rainbow more often instead of his tactile earth colors. Wilfredo Lam's drawing of a "Woman's Head" is "Picasso-production-line" negroid. His other drawing of birds is vervier; possibly a detail used for something else, it has some merit.

Siqueiros's visiting cards are both poor, especially the drawing. His painting "Head of a Mastiff Dog" is a sketch. Quite vigorous, it's a play with materials on which is imposed a vague dog's head on top of which is superimposed a truculent arabesque. Emilio Sanchez has a pretentious painting which definitely shows he is a graphic artist of merit and some magic. But not yet a real painter. He dutifully fills in with flat color (unquantified at that) the dutifully delimited spaces.

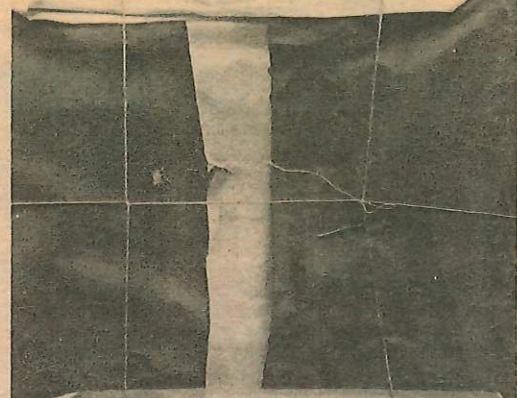
Fernando Botero's inflated-size "Still

Life with Fruits" is a salutatory exercise in loosened brushwork after so much use of old mastery finishing techniques in his better "inflated-figure" works, of which there must be some on the island. Cundo Bermudez also has better work on this island than the mural sketch in this show. The actual mural on that handsome tall thin building near the Caribe Hilton has darker blues than the sketch, making the black arabesque lines less important, is thus better.

Reasonably near his normal (limited palette) quality as a painter is Arnold Belkin's "Rape of the Sabines" but there is a chaotic dismemberment of parts in the left half of the picture which is bothersome. Back to Duchamp, Belkin! Or that marvelous 12-legged galloping bison in Altamira.

Alejandro Obregon, the magnificent painter is so-so-ishly represented here by a nice loosely brushed sketch of a "Landscape." I am sure some more important works of his, once handled by Campos Parsi, must have remained on the island. They had a magic atmosphere and sweep, missing in this sketch, which is rawer in color in finish but could be useful to our future show. It's better to aim at the highest quality available, to do justice to the artists involved. Otherwise, if our Puerto Rican entries look better it would be under false pretenses. Let's be measured against the best. And let our best be measured.

The same half-way evaluation could be made of Rene Portocarrero's charming, reasonably colorful, dance scene in this show; of Juan Ramon Velazquez' four drawings, which do a Cristo wrapping act around his old forms; of Lorenzo Homar's greyish unpretentious "Guajanas" with enamoured text as usual and of Antonio Martorell's charming prints for "Eleuterio el Coqui." Martorell's quality shows better in more direct and

*"Tired" by Francisco Rodon**"Still Life with Fruits" by Fernando Botero**"Don't Touch, Please" by Claudio Bravo**"Door" by Emilio Sanchez**"Concert" by Pettoruti*

epic (less lyric-cum-moral-lesson) subjects. Velazquez's present world of shrouded or packaged figures, folds folding and unfolding, is a possibly rich field for future growth. But their present quality is tentative, as is normal in any search of the soul.

The painting representing Luis Hernandez Cruz is also tentative, too hot in color, no beautiful cool grays or complementary touches, no more his lyric atmospheric "Fincas" of yore. Something is eating him up, inside. It is colored: two darks, one brown, two reds, plus white, is strong in contrast, and harsh in its contours. Something unnerving. And wrapped up by roundish shapes.

Also tentatively represented in this show is Rufino Tamayo. Not that his two lithos are bad. One of them, "A Woman," has beautiful muted color and both have nice tactile values. It's just that he is such a magnificent painter of originals that a litho is far removed from his true stature. I wish somebody could afford to get us a good Tamayo painting for Puerto Rico.

Now we come to the small group of painters who are represented by works which do justice to their normal quality, regardless of the stature each may eventually attain as "great creators" of art. The only artists who worry about stature, status or rank, are those who are unsure of themselves. The sure ones simply enjoy the doing, the game or the processing.

I have already mentioned Julio Rosado del Valle and MacEntyre. Their works should be considered for inclusion in our 20th Century show.

The "gran dama" of modern art in Cuba, Amelia Pelaez, is reasonably well represented by her "Pacific Ocean," femininely intimate as usual, of good composition, although a bit tired in the textures and unnecessarily dark in color, as if she had over-

worked the paint. Both she and another elder of the tribe, Emilio Pettoruti, are "cubistoid of tendency" without really believing in true cubism," as I wrote in my copy of the catalog for the 1939 World's Fair exhibit of Latin American Art. There is better color in Pettoruti's very small good composition "Concert." It is discreet. I like discreet people; no bluster about their works no matter how "creative" or how "big" or small. La Pelaez and Pettoruti remind me of my own cubistoid experiments. I really didn't believe in it, just as Oller didn't really believe in Impressionism and least of all in Cezanne. Too bad, too late.

A curious cubistoid-cum-Fauvist-color-cum-Cezanne brushstrokes semi-realist painting by Agustin Fernandez, "Still Life," is very handsome, gayly colored (one blue too dominant), and simple in composition, though there is a tendency to sameness in the size of the many small elements. Equally handsome is an all black and white "Composition in White" by Manabu Mabe, a play with materials plus dashing brushstrokes and dripped paint taking us to abstract expressionism of the 50's.

Francisco Rodon uses similar black and white techniques in his figurative and impressive "Utopia of a Man Who Is Tired." He had the visual wisdom of leaving a very large sketch unfinished, and alone when it had captured a certain intense alertness. Less is thus more in art. However, I wish he could go back to his older, more colorful palette such as in "Wild Mushrooms," present in this show. We need competition in color. We have to outdo the Fauves. Jaime Romano claims it is impossible with our light, which is so intense it dissolves all forms in a vital continuum. I still remember the Rodon of dark, somber patches of color which were better than his later too-colored acrylics of a girl in a garden and other

POP images. His present all black "Utopia" may be a self-commanded curing effort. Salutatory. Do not worry about the others, Rodon. Enjoy! Enjoy! And do. As the nightingale sings because it is in harmony with the universe and not because he is being recorded for re-play, so should you paint. The blood pressure will be steadier then, and the world too.

A similar thing can be said of one of Rolando Lopez Dirube's powerful and biologic "Combatants" in this exhibit, one of his well-known series. Imagine them in stronger colors, such as those he uses now in some of his prints, but more amply modulated. Then imagine the Combatants (Jacob and the Angel) undergoing the metamorphic process of Mondrian's "Tree" series, or the "Sea and Port" series, or the "Church" series, until only the essential signs or ashes of the struggle are left, or else the essential geometry, as he may decide. Then imagine that in his sculpture he forces his listening presences to fight each other to become combatants too!

Another good painting which could use more color is Dario Morales' "Nude with Chair." A large modern photo-hyper-realist example, it is quite striking. Fully colored, it is colorless. No nice cool painterly grays, just a warm photo effect. He should study Wyeth, the damn Yanqui or, better, Velazquez, the cool Spaniard. Within the hyper-realist field, but of last century's "real dollar bill stuck on the wall" variety, is Claudio Bravo's "Don't Touch, Please." The subject is a paper-wrapped painting. This time you see the wrapping. Trompe l'oeil. It really looks real. Don't touch.

Lucio Fontana (Fontanez in the catalogue) is excellently represented by one of his unassumingly small slashed canvas exercises. So is Antonio Berni by two of his typical relief prints, nice nostalgia pieces. And Jose Luis Cuevas is well represented by

two titillating Goyesqueries, "Human Flesh Market in Hamburg" and "The Monster and the Girl." The old lecher! Omar Rayo's "Xumux" is one of his typical black and white continuously folded bands within geometry.

Maria Somoza is in top quality with two prints in this show, especially her "Introspection," an excellent texturological and tonal arrangement with sober color, though slightly "L'Hote Academic" in its composition (I too was one of Andre L'Hote's students. I wonder how she got it?) "L'Hote Academic" means the composition of many elements is good. And you can see immediately how it was built up to be good, even very good. But if you can see how, then some mystery is gone. In the theater they say "you can see the machinery" in the same context. That's the trouble with us teachers, Maria, our works turn into compositional examples. As Andre L'Hote's work did. He was a marvelous teacher and his books on composition are tops.

Fernando de Szyslo's "Interior" is a very handsome straightforward painting limited in tonal scale and in hue (red dominant) but powerful in invocative or sacramental suggestion and neolithic, Inca possibly, in its "skeleton" or inner design.

So to "Emergency" go before the end of this month. (The emergency entrance is the easiest way in to the show.) But don't get lost as I did at 10 at night, coming out into the wrong side, alone and afoot. A policeman's car took me kindly to Puerto Nuevo. The Medical Center is huge, and its Emergency teems with humanity 24 hours a day. Great visual experiences await you in Emergency and in the art gallery beyond.

Did Chancellor Fernandez Pabon plan it that way? Art married to reality. Not as an emergency measure, I hope.