

ART

Lopez del Campo

At Galeria Coabey



Sheep (terra-cotta)

Taino Co

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

In Puerto Rico we don't often get to see sculpture shows. Paintings? Aplenty. And graphics? Galore and then more. Even here you see a score. But sculpture? It's hard work, man, dusty and slow. And you cannot titillate yourself by making chancy experiments with acids, colors or brush. You have to be sure, or the stone or wood is broken, or the metal cold or your hand cut.

At 101 San Sebastian St., a few doors from Plaza San Jose, at Galeria Coabey, Rafael Lopez del Campo has some 84 items on display until July 3, and they merit your inspection.

"That's what I felt. That's what I did. And this show is the sum," Lopez del Campo told me. "No excuses. There it stands." The exhibition represents seven years work, done since 1968. They are the studio pieces, that is, small. Some are smaller than small. Not here are the important monumental works he has produced in the same span of time. Let's mention them ahead, to see the sum of his work in scale.

First, there is the very fine monument to "Intendente Ramirez" on the Treasury Building esplanade near Old San Juan. This is the central gathering place for income tax, including the "vampiresa" extra bite. (Next April, by the way, Hacienda holds a surprise. You have to pay the complete income tax due in one single

lump sum on that very same date. None of this business of making only a half-payment, then the rest in October, as was the custom heretofore. It's one of those laws which was passed this year as you slept and for "austerity's" sake. Even many legislators will be surprised when they awake. The things we taxpayers suffer since Intendente Ramirez started collecting.

I congratulated Lopez del Campo on the happy harmony between his large "Intendente" statue and the huge Treasury Building and the beautiful relationship between those positive volumes with the negative volumes created by the esplanade and surrounding empty space.

"That was not my work," he stopped me. "Those relationships were decided by the architect. Monumental ensembles are the result of much team work. I designed the sculpture to the architect's designed size."

I feel very proud of Lopez del Campo and his hillbilly breed. Some artists bask in unearned credits. Not he. David Alfaro Siqueiros of Mexico could have learned from him. Siqueiros always fought the architects. He was a seeker of stature, thus, never at ease. The integration of the arts demands generous discipline and sureness of self.

Not very successful is Lopez del Campo's bronze monument, "San Juan Bautista," on the esplanade by the sea in front of the Capitol. The

place had such magnificent possibilities. So he lucubrated an emergent castigator of legislators, another accusing demagogue instead of an uprightly inspiring presence or example for thought. The base is too low. Besides, the volumes of the figure are too flattened and the scale slightly too small. He admitted to the truth of my criticism. "Yes, I've been told all that," he said equably. And not as an excuse, but as an explanation, he added "The Sons of Old San Juan and the Institute of Culture had only so much in funds. I did what I could."

The sculpture again reminds me of how Diego Rivera tried to punish Hernan Cortes. Trying to punish legislators makes San Juan Bautista another demagogue. Only love can create great art. A man should love the beauty of his enemies because it is they, and not his nice friends, who keep him in fine mettle. And if he vanquishes a great enemy, the glory is greater. This is a formula taken from all old tales of the "errantes caballeros" of the medieval world.

Another work done in this time is an 18-foot-tall constructed metal-sculpture (including the four-foot base) of "Don Quixote and Sancho," which stands in front of the Cervantes High School in Bayamon. Sorry I haven't seen it.

Besides the above large works, Lopez del Campo produced in the same period the "Betances" bust in

the Plaza de la Revolucion in Lares, and the "Elzaburu" bust in the Ateneo. Handsome larger-than-life heads, their strong simplified modeling with sharply contoured edges, produces impressive, powerful and dignified presences in bronze that stay in the mind's eye.

"Indian Head," a patinated plaster cast, larger than life. The exaggerated sharpness of the two eye-contours and their misalignment (one of them unanatomically lower than the other) creates a masterly expression of far-away quizzical self-determination not capturable in profile. An Indian adornment which includes the five-pointed star of our flag which the artist copied from a Taino "duho," hangs on the Indian's chest. On the unfinished left side graffiti-like signs are inscribed, including his signature under a "Puerto Rico sera libre" message. (Puerto Rico will be free).

Not very successful is his nearby similarly large size and patinated plaster-cast of Albizu Campos. The head is too squat, coarse-featured and ill-tempered in expression. It does not do justice to the elegance and highly motivated personal and spiritual beauty of the maestro I remember. His small bust of the nationalist leader is more kindly human but too much like anybody's grandfather. You have to try again, Rafael. The Betances small sketch is delightful.

There is a menagerie in this exhibit:

GALLERIES

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL

Carnegie Library
Ponce de Leon Ave., Stop 1
Puerta de Tierra 724-1046
Open Mon. to Fri. 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Current Show: "Antique Photographs" A collection of photographs from early 19th century. And oils by Katherine Newson and jewelry by Walter Newson

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.

GALERIA COABEY
Calle San Sebastian 101
Graphics, Drawings and sculpture.
Current show: sculpture by Rafael Lopez del Campo

GALERIAS DE LAS AMERICAS
152 Fortaleza Street 723-5787. 725-1455. Open
Tues. to Sat. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Current show: oils and silkscreens by Emilio Sanchez; photos by Fritz Henle.

GALERIA MARIA RECHANY
Magdalena 1363 Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon. to Sat. 725-4828. Paintings, and prints by Puerto Rican artists.
Current show: Group exposition by Puerto Rican artists.

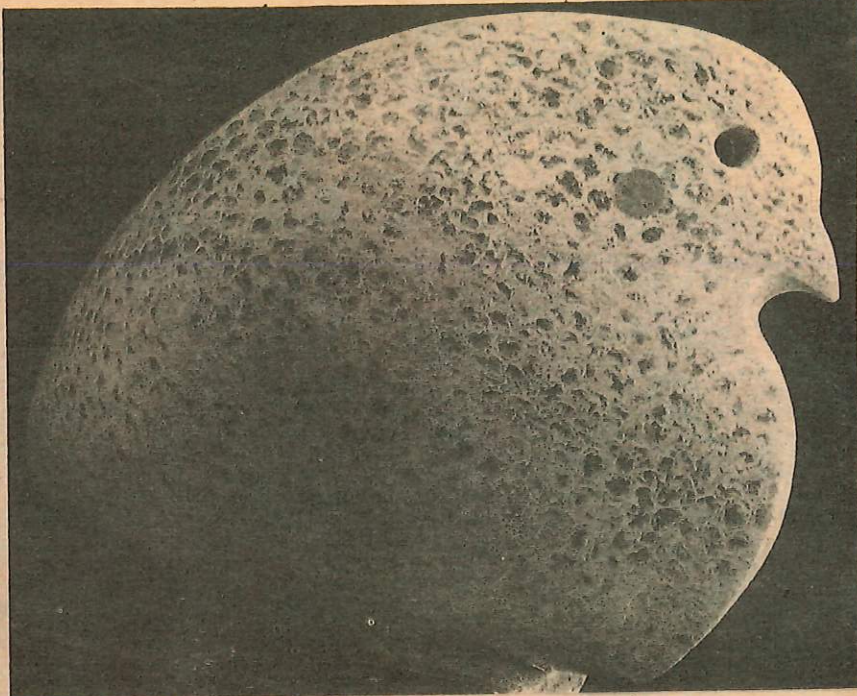
GALERIA GUARAGUAO
Callejon de la Capilla
Corner of San Francisco

GALERIA GUATIBIRI
Gonzalez and Gandara Sts., Santa Rita, Rio Piedras.

ART



al (wood)



Dove (fossil coral)

44 sculpted and 11 hand-drawn animals. Lopez del Campo is as good an "animalier" as any now in the world though the present pieces are so small they smack of the bibelot. His working space has been cramped and small. Half-foot high random pieces of stone are adroitly worked with great economy to suggest the figures with parts left unfinished. Another is almost as the stone came from nature, transformed with the minimum of effort. He draws in ink with strong simplicity and directness, crisply cross-hatched, combining strong flat shadows in some areas with pure lineal unshaded contours in others. Neolithic-geometric and free-shadow stylizations are curiously blended. One camel is serigraphed.

Some of the drawings are excellent as such and as studies for animal sculptures. Three of them, ("Don Zollo," "Don Pedro Anglero" and a "Young Girl") stand on their own as portrait sketches.

The metal constructions are whimsical exercises in assemblage produced by soldering together odd auto, bicycle and other metal parts. The "Confesionario" reminds me of one of Balossi's "Walls," but more decorated of surface. "Flight," I and II, in iron and nickel are elegant. Both are topped by birds in flight.

Now we come to the small series of 23 "coquis" carved and incised in wood. Each is a labor of love, each took up to two weeks of work,

whereas the large powerful "Indian Head" in cast plaster took only one week. But these exquisite two-inch tall miniatures are glued to the most badly proportioned bases I have ever seen. Besides, the grain of the wooden bases is stronger than the grain of the little sculptures, cannibalizing them. The bases should be painted white, to allow better display of the charming little frogs on top.

"Those coquis pursued me since my studies in Italy," he said. (He had studied sculpture for five years in Puerto Rico under Compostela at the Institute of Culture school, then in 1962 he received a scholarship to Rome, where he earned his professor's license.) "I made a portfolio of graphics on them. Then, on carving them, since I had little work space and less money for wood, I decided on their present miniature scale. But imagine them one meter high or even more." A huge blown up photograph of one of them on the wall dramatizes their potential impact in this show.

I imagine many of them in El Morro or on any esplanade or public plaza, cast in clear or translucent plastic (since the little animals seem actually translucent themselves). A light shining from within each form makes the incised designs sparkle. Recorded coqui sounds come from all around. Children can play around and over them. The ensemble would be a fiesta for the eye-the touch, and the ear.

Much better than those opaque turtle-like shapes in front of our recently inaugurated Condado Convention Hall.

"Each coqui has a different Taino design," Lopez del Campo continued. "I documented myself on the various symbols used by the Tainos to represent the various elements — water, fire, air, earth — plus the five-pointed star found on a 'duho'."

I asked Lopez del Campo about those one and two foot tall animal sculptures he exhibited at the Institute of Culture eight years ago. "Some are left at home, others dispersed when sold." I feel badly about our insular scale for one: If they had been done to Mateo Hernandez' or the Egyptian scale for once: If they had been done would be in some international museum now, they were that good. They are gracing Puerto Rican interior spaces now.

"I was born in the countryside of Barrio Quebrada Grande of Barranquitas at a cock's song distance from that marble mountain in Barrancas, said Lopez del Campo, 40. They were making marble tiles from it not long ago. The Treasury Building has some interior walls covered with such thin tiles used as a decorative touch. They first cut one and two-meter high blocks. The other day the place seemed abandoned, the derricks rusted."

I am pained. A similar quarry of white limestone lies abandoned in the

south of France. Derricks, since 1880, still stand around, like antediluvian monsters...Since portland cement was invented, rows of huge soft lime-stone blocks, neatly cut, await. We make one-foot high-sculptures here.

"Bonilla," he tells me, "Find out what happened to the Luis Llorens Torres Monument project, an international contest held a few years ago which we won — a team composed of Arq. Efrain Perez Chanis, Arq. William Santana, Otto Reyes Casanova, Pedro Juan Hernandez and myself. Sculpture, architecture, lights, waters and sound were designed together into one beautiful ensemble. \$100,000 worth at that time. We worked hard. What happened to it?"

What happened to it, dear readers? Was it nothing but somebody's ego trip? Such a long time ago. (Blocks of marble wait). Derricks lay abandoned: Years of inertia. There's a lot of consuming acid in the air. (Blocks of marble wait.)

Lopez del Campo has taught at the Institute of Culture since 1971: basic sculpture initially, now metal and monumental sculpture. "An act of faith in the future," is what teaching is for him. "A projection into my country's future," he says with eyes a-gleam. (Blocks of marble wait.)

Nature compressed marble to make diamonds. Man crushes marble to make concrete pavements...or he could carve "Pietas".

Blocks and derricks, WAIT. Please Wait!

GALERIA LUCARI

Patio Mall, Mayaguez, Open 10-5 Mon. to Sat.
Current show: Collective exhibition: Puerto Rican artists.

LA GALERIA

Callejon de la Capilla, Old San Juan.
Current show: "The Animals Within," Linoleum cuts by Consuelo Gotay.

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.

Current show: Pre-Columbian Meso American Art.

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.

MUSEO DE ARTE

Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras 764-0000, Ext. 2452 or 2456. Open Mon. to Fri. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Sun.

Current show: Latin-American prints from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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.

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.; Closed Tues. Current show: Paintings by Diogenes Ballester Rodriguez, Jorge L. Morales Torres and Henry Cabrera Serrano

UNIVERSIDAD INTERAMERICANA

San German. Beverly Student Center. Current show: Annual exhibit by Art Students. Also collective graphics show.