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# Institute Board Called Upon To 'Read Signs' On Biennial

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Special To The STAR

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Felix Bonilla Norat is a professor at the University of Puerto Rico's School of Fine Arts and a contributor to the STAR of articles on the local art scene.

Although it has been reported as dead and buried, the Fourth Biennial of Latin American Graphics is struggling to rise from its Institute of Puerto Rican Culture grave. The prayers of island art students and other concerned persons are supplying oxygen. And the biennial may pull through — perhaps minus a limb or two, but still breathing — if the institute's board of directors starts reading... signs.

**Sign I:** The Art Students League has guaranteed \$20,000 in cold cash, backed by its construction fund bank account and the signed pledges of league founder Norman Hopgood and vice president Osvaldo Garcia, to revive the biennial. This \$20,000 would replace the politically loaded Bicentennial funds that have already been returned. Thus, the Bicentennial funds should no longer be a legitimate excuse for either boycotting or closing the biennial. Any artist who would boycott the biennial now would become a laughing stock; he would stand naked as a politician, not an artist. But it is the institute's board of directors who are boycotting the biennial now. Who are the peo-

ple playing politics at this stage of the game?

**Sign II:** Institute director Luis Rodriguez Morales was initially amenable to the Art Students League proposal. Then he called a meeting of the board and after the meeting his spine was stiffened. Ergo, the board although not endowed with executive powers — as noted by board director Enrique Laguerre — is a stiffener of executives and a behind-the-throne exerciser of executive power, even though

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political turmoil is no longer a threat to the biennial.

**Sign III:** I asked Carlos Conde, a member of the institute's board, to sign a petition asking that the biennial works already on the island be exhibited, with the assent of the artists, for local art students. Conde answered: "I can't sign that because — and you can quote me — the board of directors has decided to speak no more about the biennial." A special code of ethics for the board! Just like doctors, lawyers and the police. Only the "proper members" of the board can decide what is right and what is wrong. When specialists answerable only to themselves take command, the public be damned. Who checks on those who check on cultural manifestations for the rest of us?

**Sign IV:** Just about everyone wants the biennial to be held, especially the art educators on the island. Among those who have expressed the belief that the works should still be shown are Carmen Tuya, director of the Education Department's Visual Arts Program, Felix Rodriguez Baez, director of the institute's School of Plastic Arts and Luis Hernandez Cruz, head of the University of Puerto Rico's School of Fine Arts. But the institute has forgotten its educational duties and its board of directors has been levitated above and beyond us earthly teachers. Who or what can reach the board? Transcendental Meditation?

**Sign V:** About 30 local artists, including those who originally boycotted the biennial over the Bicentennial funds, recently met at the Art Students League and gave their support to the league's efforts at raising money from local sources to replace the Bicentennial funds. The league came through like a thoroughbred in record time; but the institute board still hasn't left the starting gate.

A board of directors which can't read so many earthly signs is out of this world. The special code of ethics that board members has developed for themselves is a defense mechanism. In defense of the board's dignity. The board is huffy because its members made an inept mistake ini-

tially. If the board members were more human — like the rest of us — or if they were smart politicians, they wouldn't need defensive silence and so much caution.

The whole affair proves that a hallowed whole like the "venerable" board has swallowed its particular members. These members are honorable and marvelous individuals, all of them. I'd love to have them fighting at my side when the Martians invade the Earth.

But not if they want to fight as a board. Boards of directors make their members' knees tremble collectively.