

ART

Art From The Camera Is No Snap

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special To The STAR

In the last two months six independent exhibits in San Juan, without anybody's desire or design, have explored photography's place amongst the arts of man. They came like too many of our art shows, seemingly unrelated to each other, like ships passing each other in the night.

Let us relate their courses before they are completely gone from sight. Four and a half of them you can still see, until the end of this month. Fritz Henle's show is almost gone except for some items still in San Juan's "Gallery of the Americas" at 152 Fortaleza Street. Henle represents the grand professional, he who snaps as he plans his pictures, a classical-liberal attitude in hunting photographs or big game.

The "Playa de Ponce Young Photographers" now presented at the Puerto Rico General Archives Building on Ponce de Leon Ave. in front of Munoz Rivera Park are the playful hunting-gang of snappers, singing on their way: vitality and unexpected moments of truth are their game.

Antonio Molina's charming collection of old European and Caribbean photos is still at the Carnegie Library, downstairs. Old photographs couldn't be snapped: they had to be posed, and the poses had to be held. That's part of their studied charm. Molina's complete collection, plus Puerto Rican "family photos" of historical interest, will be shown again at the UPR soon.

Even more studied are the works by two photographers: Ramon Aboy (now at Aboy Gallery, 900 Ponce de Leon Avenue in Miramar) and Charles Blasini Rivera (now at Casa Campeche Art Gallery in Old San Juan). Their works are products of willful design and mastery of methods and techniques, not of chance.

In this review I'll cover another studied angle of the subject, the "Photography in the Graphic Arts" presentation put up by the Pratt Institute's Graphics Center, under the auspices of the Puerto Rico Institute of Culture and as part of the dormant Biennial of Latin American Graphics. The exhibit is being held during July, possibly part of August, inaugurating the recently reconstructed Aboy Photo Gallery at 900 Ponce de Leon Ave, across the street from the Jewish Synagogue in Miramar. Next to the Photo Gallery is the Aboy Photo Academy, now matriculating students for various courses to open soon at 601 Aboy Street, the other address of the same building.

Photography can be a simple Paleolithic hunting game or else a studied Neolithic-to-Modern arty job in the shooting of it. And in its darkroom processing it can go from simple primitive cookery with lights, liquids and salts, to artful modern sleights-of-hand with negatives, positives, and infra-red-ultra-violet projec-

tions, plus primitive leather-tanning, leather-tawing and other colloidal chemistry permutations.

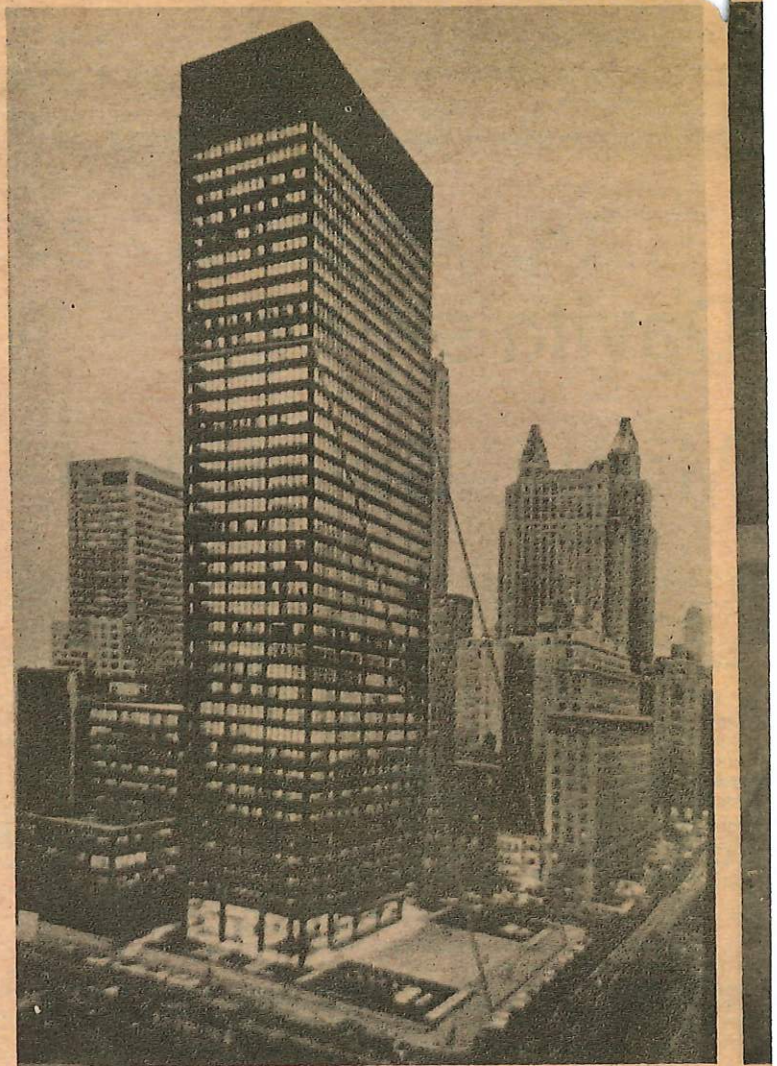
"I'll tan your hide" is both a punishing and a photographic phrase, very useful in other graphic arts. Light hardens and tans bichromated or ganic colloids such as white of eggs, gelatine and starch known from Neolithic times, plus many modern synthetic resins, including polyvinyl chloride and polyvinyl alcohol, all usable for making photo-emulsions.

These "slow" photo emulsions are still around for various graphic processes. They can be used for making black-and-white (or any-pigment-and-white) photo-prints on paper, or they can be used to protect the metal plates while etching them in "agua fuerte" or acid, for intaglios. Also, once developed on the lithostone, they can be used for printing with lithographic inks. Finally, they can be used for making silk screens with photographic details for serigraphy.

The serigraphic "direct screens" can be made any size by "squeegeeing" a coat of the photo-emulsion directly on to the silk itself and letting dry under a very subdued illumination. A positive of the art work is produced by hand on clear acetate film (or on translucent paper, and can include photographic details if they are properly reticulated). This positive is then put in direct contact with the screen under a heavy glass (special vacuum contact-tables are more fool-proof for extra fine details). Light passing through the glass and the clear parts of the positive hardens the bichromated emulsion underneath. After exposure, the screen is hosed with warmish water: the parts covered by the opaque dark parts of the positive are softened, will wash away, and thus allow paint to go through for the serigraphic printing.

The "indirect screens" are produced by rolling a coat of the same emulsion on an acetate film. The same positive as before is put in direct contact with the dried bichromated film; the latter is then exposed to light through the positive as before, then hosed properly as before. The still-wet but light-"hardened" emulsion is now pressed carefully into close contact with the silk. The acetate film is removed once the emulsion dries attached to the silk. The screen is now ready for printing.

After many sleepless nights and dyed fingers you can master any of the above techniques. Or else you can prepare your own separate positives, one for each color, all on acetate films in careful register with each other. Then you order the photo-screens or the photo-etchings, or the photo-lithostones or the offset metal plates to be made by commercial work-shops here or in New York, at so much per square inch. If you have made the necessary positives (sometimes it is a negative that is needed)



"Seagram Project" by Ben Berns

and if you control the printing process, even if you hire some commercial printing shop to help run the job through, you can call your work an original graphic work and sign it with relative, not absolute, pride.

But if you only produce an original which is "reproduced by other artists, you aren't entitled to sign the work. If, however, you work with them during the various processes, and if they sign on the left and you sign on the right of the work, then you can sign the edition itself. But certainly with much less pride than if you do the whole job. Real parenthood or authorhood is rather indivisible.

I wonder how many of the Pratt Graphic Center "originals" used commercial resources? I realize this is a picayunish question in an art world of ready-mades where art is one with reality and a Donald Judd can order his sculptures made in a factory and sent to the museum without touching them.

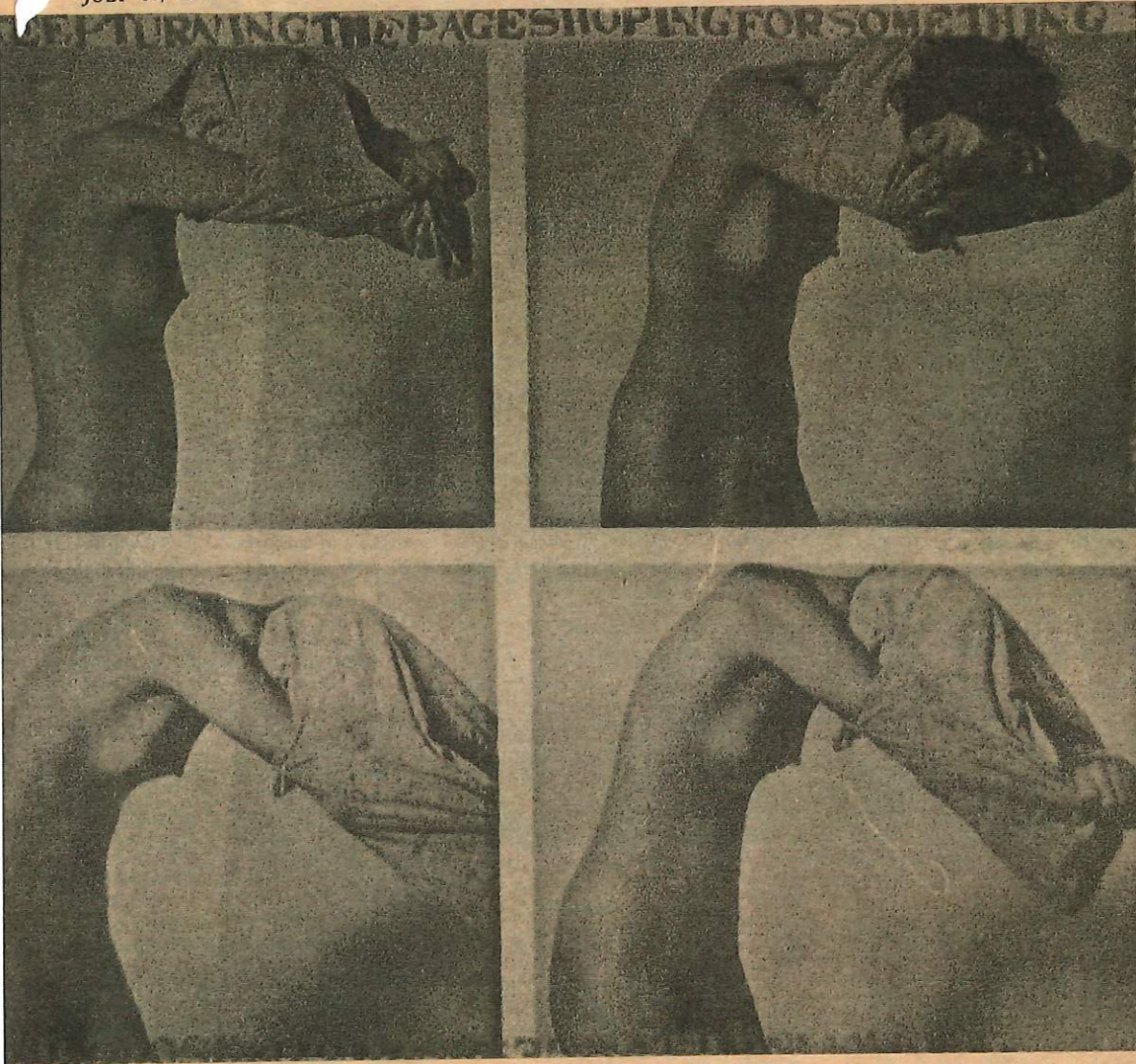
Angela Jansen's "Historical Perspective" is a pitfall. If it is called an etching but is no more than a regular photograph of a large current-day attentive crowd of Americans, photoengraved or etched on metal as by any typical commercial plant. The old drawings of Indian heads and torsos printed in red above the black and white "photo", supply the so-called "perspective." This work seems to be below the limits of permissibility in original art. Call it hyper-realism? OK! OK!

Karl Bethke's memento mori of an intaglio, titled "Self-portrait with Pink

Seal," uses a fourfold repetition of a newspaper half-tone positive made from his photographed head, in a very legitimate creative manner. The pink-seal's message (like so many "liberal" messages today) cannot be read: jumps from Yiddish to German to English, Babel-like.

One of the best works in the show is "Torso in A Circle" by John J. Jhle. A relief plus photo-gravure print, it seems to use a photo-cut for the dark circle in the center plus geometry for the design against a finely-grained "gravured" background. The background goes from black to light in infinitesimal stages which would be difficult to produce by hand. Commercial "Gravure's fine reticulation is very handy and permissible here!

A strange problem is created by Robert Burkert's "Interior with Stan and Ollie" (of the Movies), a photo-serigraph. Initially I saw it as a bunco job- a hoax: nothing but a large commercial reproduction of an old movie still in full but strange color. It seems to cater to today's nostalgic moods. Then I had a double-take: The huge Alice in Wonderland cat; the mummified watchers, deep in the wall; the Negro's face on a rectangle on the wall; the huge Coca-Cola bottle and the beginning of a fire behind a window — those are not the usual signs of a "commercial" mind. But by then it is too late: the initial impression takes over. A merchant can have deep thoughts, too, and he can display them all over the place, with a



"We Keep on Turning the Pages" by Ryo Watanabe

horror of empty spaces as of empty ladders.

Another serigraph titled "1970" by Jack Stuck is simply excellent first hand — then causes a double-take: is it a monotype? Three positive figures, alike except for a leg and penis detail, seem to be progressively stuck on separate films on the piece, as if the figure were in the process of becoming. Movable leaves in the wind — very metaphorical. But monotypical. He discreetly limited the edition to ten. I consider each "copy" an original.

There are less problems about Ed O'Connell's "Rainbow's End" serigraph. Photographically he produced a screen-door-like mesh on his silk-screen, then he arranged all the rainbow's colors on one printing end, swiped all of them across with one single pass of the squeegee in a very economical printing of all the colors at once. But that process is risky; the next printing won't be exactly the same. Though it doesn't matter much in a limited edition, that's a monotype for you!

Personally, I feel monotypes such as O'Connell's should be admissible in a print show — the plastic effect is good in every print within a limited edition, until the colors start spreading and mixing too much. I do believe the rules of the 4th Biennial of Latin Graphics on the subject are understandably reasonable but too absolute.

I have already pointed out, in my "MOMA Latin Graphics" review, how

the New York Museum of Modern Art does include monotypes as "prints". Now we have the Pratt "Graphics Center" including monotype equivalents in this print show without even mentioning the fact. Quo Vadis, us islanders? Do we stick to our stricter codes? Stricter than those of the "Popes" of the graphic field?

There are possibilities in an insular situation such as ours — If we can produce a beauty such as the Venus de Milo! The island of Milo or Melos kept producing serene classicism in its insularity, way into the very baroque hellenistic period. The only "Hellenistic" touch of the Venus sculpture is its sensuous touchability as "flesh". I used to spank the beauty's shiny marble derriere in the Louvre...until its pedestal was raised a-propos. Now its beautiful ample buttocks are to be gazed at only. Museum curators are so moral!

Or maybe jealous! I was beginning to feel kind of personal about that island beauty...

Ana Wong's "The White Elephant Fantasy" is an elegant rhythmic and economically produced textuology with a nice touch of color. Rhythmic also is the four-color intaglio "Pantomime" by another oriental artist, Myeung Ro Youn. He (or she) curiously blends the two worlds of biology and geometry as we Puerto Ricans seem to be doing wholesale.

Prawat Laucheroen's "Africa" intaglio produces a flutter of veiled mystery before our eyes. Another kind, daylight mystery, is sensed in Barbara Fragonen's etching of "Two Boys

and a Sprinkler" with its art nouveau rhythms and "bam-bam-bam" text.

Douglas Wadden's "Kathy in Plastic Two" is an effective, economically produced lithograph. Andrew Stasik, Director of Pratt's Graphic Center, is reasonable with his "Still Life Landscape num" litho.

A conceptual play on the "Rules of Warfare by Militarists, getting their firstest with the mostest and the least effort", is utilized by L.J. Stein in his etching "Manhattan Guide Out Of and Into". Boy, is he hectic about Manhattan's rat-traps.

It is sad that "name" artists are badly represented here. Overproduction, or the energy crisis, seems to have caught up with them. Jim Dine's item of his "Tool Box Series" is just an item. Clare Romano's "New Jersey Landscape" collograph is a catalogue of textures producible. Pol Bury's "Eiffel Tower" serigraph has the shakes in an obvious three-color-separation. And so on.

Orlando Condesso produced a haunting concept in his print. Let's quote its complete title to end all titles and this review:

"There is no life no longer
There is no world no longer
There is no God no longer
There is no man no longer
There is no death no longer
There's only an infinite Bip Bip Bip..."

Not a good thought before going to bed, is it?

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: Exhibit by the Art Students League

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: "Taller Tetuan," a collective print exhibition

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 FOTOGRAFIA PL 900

Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce. 725-2617 open 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. Current show: "Photography in Printmaking." 30 prints from Pratt Graphics Center.

GALERIA DE LA CASA CAMPECHE

200 Calle San Sebastian "Hoyos blancos," exhibit of photographs by Charles Biasiny Rivera

GALERIA GUARAGUAO

Callejon de la Capilla, Off San Francisco
Current Show: Serigraphs by Don Rubbo. Artist demonstrates how to make prints.

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 GUATIBIRI

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

LA GALERIA

Callejon de la Capilla, Old San Juan.
Current show: Serigraphs by Maria Guadalupe

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. 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Paintings by-Rosita Haeussler, Ana Molina and Delta de Pico

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: "I am New York" Works of art by Latin American residents in the Big Apple.

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

Photographed by Jose Feliciano