

Puerto Rican Art: Banking On the Images

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Special To The STAR

The future of Puerto Rican art into the 21st Century will be very rich if all of us get psychiatric help or learn to understand ourselves. We have art in the banks.

There is such a richness in our col-

lective conscious mind, plus the sub-conscious, that it guarantees a tremendous supply of symbolic images of the self if we can only tap it for the use of the visual and the dramatic arts. The image supply is so extensive that it guarantees our continued eclecticism in art, and our

everlasting-process-of-becoming in art, as in politics and the social sciences.

Yes, Independentistas, Populares and Statehooders will still be fighting it out way into the next century, just as the Id, the Ego and the Superego, respectively, always fight each other within every one of us. This tripartite fight, plus the "Puerto Rican Sinecdoche" wherein a part speaks for the whole, or the whole for the parts, plus the Puerto Rican fixations on mother-father-uncle respectively, evaluating the fight as arbitrators never in accord, constitute the Puerto Rico Syndrome, to be tapped as our singular energy source, as always for everything, but specially for art. Images belong to artists, poets, prophets and dreamers.

Up to now, our image supply has been earthy. It is variegated because we are the eternal crossroads island since Atlantis sank in the ocean and forced our first colonizers to land here. (Can you prove they did not?) They also landed here from Florida, according to the Statehooders; from Yucatan according to the Populares; and from Venezuela, according to the Independentista archaeologists. Pick a travel brochure from anywhere: we came from there! So we can draw from there all kinds of earthy gods, for all kinds of art.

But we are limited in territory. We have to expand. Use art and metaphor!

The marine gods will be re-activated by our need for food. We have to develop the marine-biology nutrient sciences, thus adding their powerful images to our cosmogony and ancestral pantheon.

The images of the fire and air gods will be added by our need to develop chemical nutrients from everywhere. Air and fire in art could be very lively.

How do I know these things? My children tell me so! They ought to know, for they are designing the future. One of them is into chemistry now because there's a future in it for Puerto Rico, he says. He used to tell me he wanted to become a psychiatrist because Puerto Rico's problem is not one of political status, but of its "estado demente (de mente)", its demented mental status.

Why did my son change to chemistry? I imagine that since he is a socialist, his Marxist friends have talked to him about the effectiveness of Freud. What a pity! Freud plus Jung created, or at least explained, a great pantheon of visual images that can both explain art and enrich it.

The Marxists should read Russel Jacobi's book, "Social Amnesia". As a good party-line Marxist he punishes the psychologists for their theoretical innovations which they do not bother to tie or relate to the past, which, naturally is the Marxist past which may include ancestral-memory-banks but no images of the Gods. (No images, no art or poetry. — What a pity!) Jacobi then punishes Freud's therapy methods, which do not seem to work with "colonized peoples" whose past is repressed by the metropolitan-planned obsolescence of facts. But then he admits that Freud's thought "has to be related" to Marxist thought. I'll say!

If the Marxists want to inherit the Earth they should start learning all kinds of psychiatry, for the minds and dreams of men cannot be inherited by any particular political state or system. To the contrary, each man inherits all systems. Too many such systems and empires have come and gone. What remains is the historical and the archetypal or ancestral

memory banks which include all systems. The ideas of the gods are nothing but vivid metaphorical and cosmogonic images, cues for us artists and the prophets. These images are the source of our energy as a people and as artists. Let's learn to tap them!

I don't know about tapping the ancestral memory banks of the North Americans, though we certainly have the right as citizens to annex them to our peril as a tribe. Spanish has a "Real Academia" to guard the entrance of every word into the language. English swallows whole languages. We could swallow, too. Let's be imperial.

Let's not forget that in the future of Puerto Rican Art there will be a hell of a lot of "federally influenced cases", since New York seems steady as the present center of world-wide-arts, depression notwithstanding. A Federal case and a federal offence (Uncle Sam or stern Avuncular images), were since my childhood (it was drummed into me) awe-inspiring offenses. Insular laws and police agents (normally repressive father images) were always more maneuverable or understanding. (Influence of the soft mother images). You see how the image-banks work, whether we like it or not? Such images can go directly into the arts of painting or sculpture, even in abstract form: biomorphism is motherliness, emotions; geometry is fatherly codes and constructions.

A lot of insular-vs.-federal and federal-vs.-insular cases will go to the courts as we try to expand our prerogatives as a people (expansive Id image). The federals will try to defend their coupons. (Stern Avuncular Superego image). We will enjoy what we get (Adult Ego image, or the Reality Principle).

Those insular-federal cases are the reasons my eldest son has for studying law, eventually he says, after he finishes his master's in social and political philosophy. In the meantime he teaches World Studies to Latin children in New York and is paid by U.S. tax-payers' money (Expansive come-hither avuncular image).

In many tribes, when the mother dies, the children and the art works do not belong to the father — they have to go with their maternal uncle: they belong to the tribe of the mother not of the father. Our Indians in Puerto Rico had similar inheritance customs (matriarchy image).

In this connection, the original Christian religion (macho images of benevolent Christ and apostles and Pope plus the separate-awfully-strict-patriarchal Jehovah) wouldn't have been tolerable to our Puerto Rico Indians who had the much more satisfactory cosmogony of a Great-Mother who was both wife and mother to their Great-Father image (Nicely incestuous Aedipal relationship, isn't it?) It is locked into the web of our memory-bank, and explains the art work of many of our present-day mother-valenced or mother-unvalenced artists. But let that remain locked for the time being. . . Pop and the Uncle come into it too, remember.)

Pursuing our Colonial memory-bank, notice how the Spaniards brought with them steel arms, fire-arms, metal armour and know-how. Plus the memory banks of Iberians, Phoenicians, Romans, various Gothics, Celts, Moors and of those ransacked during their conquests. Notice how they used the Centaur image in Puerto Rico: man-on-horseback, eternal figuration of swift pursuit and retribution or death. Notice the terribly noisy and sharp-

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toothed Dog-totem: Becerrillo, the calf-sized hunting dog, trained to smell Indians.

But the Spaniard's conquering touch, their great weapons, was their Virgin Mary, the Great-Mother figure. If the medieval sages of our Christian church had not instituted the very painterly and sculptural Marian cult or dogma into our religion, our Indians would have fought more and killed more Spaniards than they did. When the Spanish priests explained the Father-Mother-and-Son cosmogony, the Indians understood. Father-Son-and-Holy-Ghost is too macho a Trinity. But the benign Mother figure softened the machista image — and our Indians gave in.

A similar syncretistic process of acculturation in art and customs occurred with the tremendous amounts of images we can borrow from our African cosmogonical memory-banks, which were several banks really depending on tribal origins. The Negroes are very fertile image makers — but the Catholics are too, with their pantheon of saints. For practically any animistic or animalistic god invented you can find a Catholic saint with similar attributes — whether on earth, water, air or fire you invent a spirit as an explanatory myth based on a certain fact, you can find a Catholic saint to take over its totem power.

Thus, the American invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 borrowed the July 25 totemic power of Spain's patron Saint Santiago, and our ELA celebration on the same date of July 25 borrowed, or tried to cancel, the previous totemic powers. Good historical sense of image use. We Puerto Ricans seem to be tied to history's apron-strings or umbilical chords. To succeed here, a candidate for governor must have such a sense of history's continuity.

In Catholic countries the Negroes have managed to keep memories of their tribal gods and cosmogonies, plus even their art images, longer than in the iconoclastic Protestant countries. Some Catholic priests may frown and even burn the heathen images, but if the Negro Shaman is wise, he will add the proper saint's name to his "heathen" god, maybe also dress it half-way like the appropriate Christian god or saint and the priest most likely will smile. You can see many such cases of artful syncretism in Loiza now, and other places, including bourgeois suburban homes where many Cubans practice "santeria" rites complete with guinea hens and eclectic art works.

The possibilities for artistic creation to be found in all of the above conscious and subconscious archetypes and image-banks are obviously great.

"But that's copying Neolithic art styles" you may object. Certainly not! Notice how the Szyzlo of Peru makes modern abstract paintings out of Inca designs. In Puerto Rico, Hernandez Cruz is into it, though not as literally as Cecilia Orta, Alberto Ortiz Collazo or Avilio Cajigas and others.

Of course such art and much of current Latin-American art is disparagingly called "totemic" by some art historians who prefer strict-pure-abstract art. To them I'd say, "Listen to Mondrian mix his metaphors between reality and art, listen to Kandinsky's explanations of the point, the line and the plane. Those explanations are cosmogonic too, a supposedly new language of art — yet his metaphors are down to earth, as





old as the Earth and the hearth, as new as a new-born babe. And as for Albers squares within the square, his planes were his battlefield, basketball court or baseball diamond to play colors against each other."

When to a visual figuration or movie succession of images you add a title, which is a conceptual summing up of a human situation, you can get very potent visual results. Witness the visual conceptual art works lately created by our Governor Hernandez Colon with his "Flag," "Anthem" and "Obstacle" pieces, or by Carlos Irizarry in his "Court Piece", or by the Israeli commandos in Uganda, with their "President of Uganda" piece.

Such conceptual art pieces say more than hundreds of speeches because of the immediacy of the visual images brought forth from our tremendously wealthy image banks, both conscious and subconscious. (Uncle Sam is a conscious image, the "Universal Uncle" is subconscious. — It is important to stress this fact to explain Uncle Sam's success in Puerto Rico so far. If we remain matriarchally tied, the "Uncle" inherits).

Before we end our discussion of our figurations repertoire, remember the imago. It is an image too, which can be imagined. It is also any insect in its final adult stage, sexually mature, usually with wings. But then, in psychoanalysis, the imago is also the more or less infantile conception of the parent that is retained in our subconscious self, usually throughout our lifetime, no matter how much we can "grow up", no matter how much our Ego is in control.

How have your imagoes acted up lately? In your dreams or in art and prophecy?

If besides your imagoes (both the sexually mature and the infantile), you have to figure out how your repressed Id is acting up (The Independentists, the creative spontaneous, combustible artists and others in whose hands we have put our Ateneos and other cultural manifestations) plus how your avuncular Super Ego is acting up: (the Estadistas, who represent our harking back to the primeval source of all life, the metropolis, not I mean the primeval waters, the blissful submersion in the calming ancestral waters), no wonder the Ego is harassed! — (The Ego is our Reality Principle, supposedly in command, our Populares). Now you can see the tremendous possibilities we have for creating great art in the 21st century. We have a plethora of riches, if we can understand them enough to tap them, no matter how eclectic the result.

Sexually aroused adult insects always make noises, calling for their mates. Now imagine all our imagoes, images and our Ids, Egos and Superegos crammed up within our small island making noises to assert themselves!

It is an "olla de grillos" (look that up, I can't because of the noise). If to that noisy caldron full of expressive yet mutually repressed personality traits you add the "Puerto Rico Synecdoche" symptom wherein the whole, which is always bigger than the sum of its parts, dares speak for a particular part, or, more interestingly, the parts dare to speak for the whole caldron... Well! A bigger noise is produced!

No wonder even the other Latinos do not understand us in Latin political caucuses, as happened lately. But they would understand our art. Let's get to it!