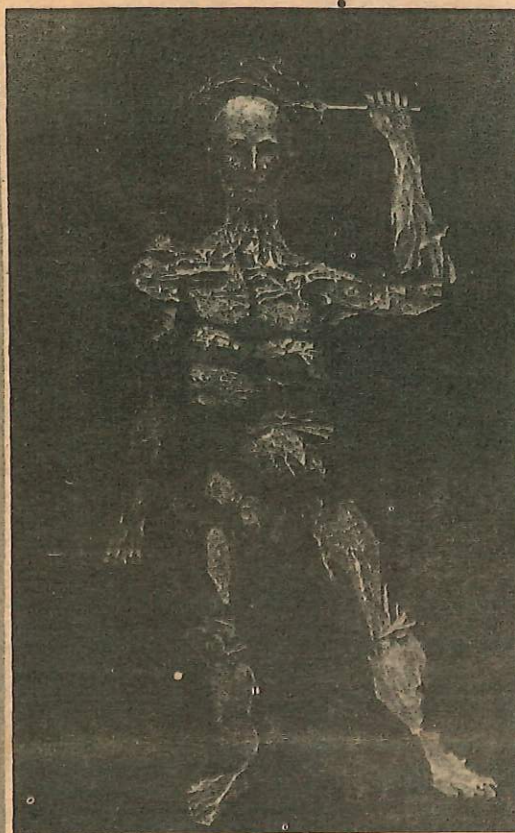


ART

New Paintings and Old Engravings

*"Eureka" by Augusto Marin*

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Old horses like me use the same old path to travel back and forth between work and home. My road is Catano-Rio Piedras by publico in the morning and in the afternoon MBA Route One to San Juan then the restful ferry home. When there are no wars or strikes and if the world continues on its run...

But the other day Luis Hernandez Cruz took me out of my way. He was delivering new works to Maria Rechany's Art Gallery so I found myself in Condado territory, Magdalena Avenue 1363, somebody's one-story home turned into an art-showplace, a gallery at once humble and full of dignity where Maria has struggled to keep the light burning for more than a year. I had never gone before. You readers should go. Most items for sale are lighted in a homey way as they might look in your own home.

The present exhibit is of recent paintings and of old engravings and will last until August 20.

The international market in old engravings is brisk. Shows travel to many countries back and forth until they are sold. I suspect some of the items are reprints from the original plates, done as the hallowed San Fernando Academy once did with Goya's metal plates. But if the print quality is good, who cares? Art for both the elites and the masses is

good. Good educational fare. And decorative if you have the flair.

There is a haunting quality in old metal engravings which the moderns have lost. A silvery light pervades them all which in Puerto Rico I have seen only in some of Carlos Raquel River's work. The moderns seek dashing textural experiments, dare to play dark flat masses against thin lines or accidental splashes with measured ones. Japan's influence, I imagine, and modern art's. The ancients (mostly Baroque but also last century's Realists and this century's academicians) model forms with careful parallel lines, or else rhythmic cross-hatchings. Small dots of white appear even in the densest darks and that's the secret of the silvery light.

The present old engravings in Maria's gallery come from Paris' and, were shown in London and Washington. Critic Antonio Molina of "El Mundo" was helping her hang the works when I arrived. "Remember," he said, "You both have to help me with the coming UNESCO Annual Salon in September." He is always on the go, never lets up. He is in earnest and by now is one of us earning his place as a peer. Cuba is far and beyond...

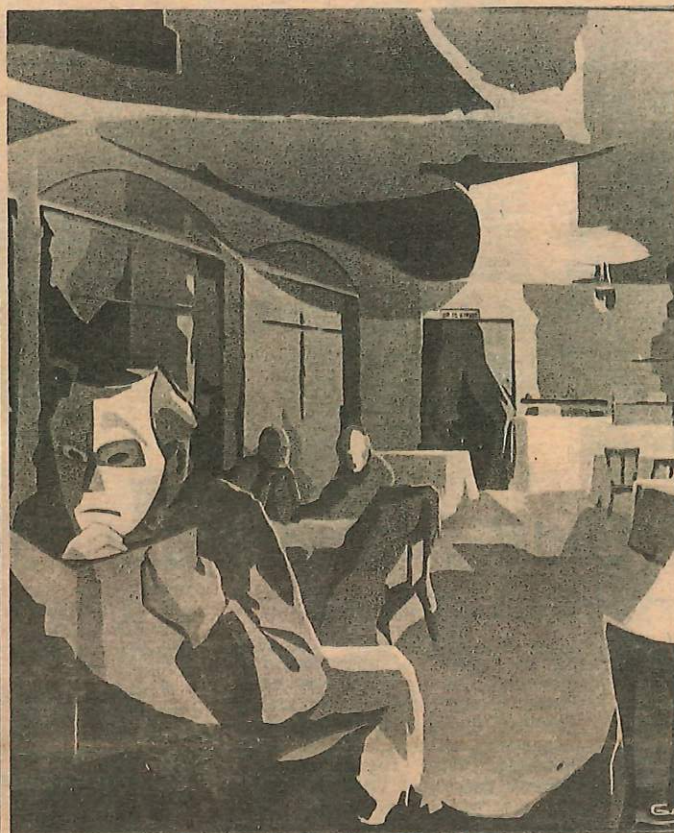
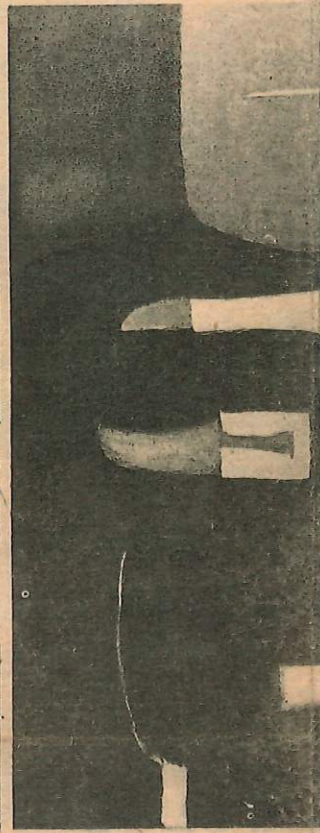
Puerto Rico has been graced by useful "invaders" since the Tainos invaded the Ignieris. There are "Indias" for all "colonizers," with "Coronas," and rice and beans with a little meat,

or "guineitos" plus codfish, or at least "sopa." God bless us all in the melting pot! God bless our "aroma!"

The present exhibit of paintings is quite representative of current Puerto Rican art offerings.

I was happy to see three by Epifanio Irizarry. Dear old Fanol there it was: his old helter-skelter brushwork, his old verve, loose composition, and ivory color to say nothing of his eternal subjects, "Musicians," a "Cockfight," a "Marina," and a "Don Quijote and Sanchez." Time has stood still for him. I envy him. He can sing at every stretch of the way, every hour of the day, without worry or pain even when in pain, a man alive with a brush in hand. Who cares about modernity or style or artistic research?

Irizarry's horses are alive in this show, as are those by Augusto Marin, alert and growing wings. Best of all are five horses by John Balossi: handsome, free standing forms, swinging in water color and ink techniques yet each with a recall to earth in its tactile play with the artist's materials. I've always had an urge for painting horses, but especially when I was in my forties. Galloping, alert horses with manes and tails flowing in the wind. Very erotic. A woman's curves plus the piston-rod legs are combined in one single form as in coitus. Completion and classicalness — beautiful shapes, unless, of course, the horse

*"Restaurant Date" by Juan Garcia Segovia**"Composicion"*

has a rider too big for him, as happens too often with our paso fino horses in ordinary use in the streets. Then the proportions of the forms suffer.

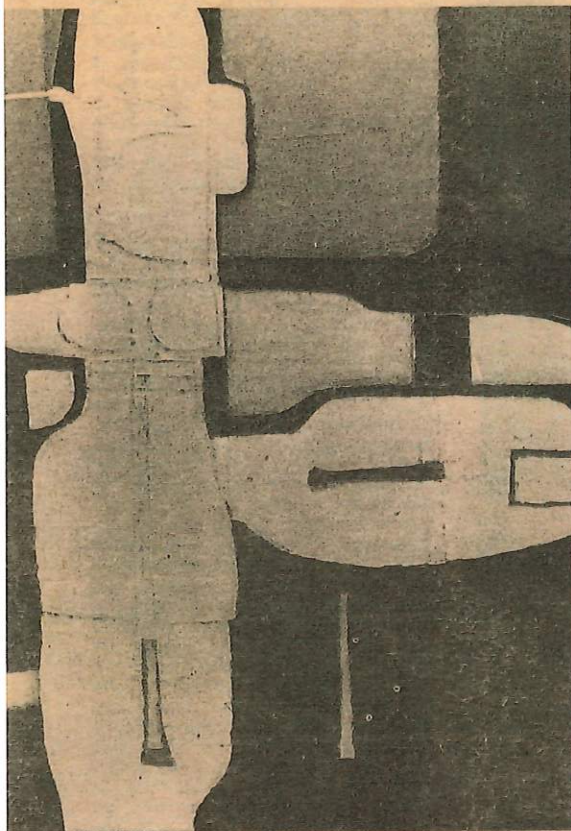
Besides his colorful water-color, Marin has a very good impastoed study of a man, "Eureka," but I wonder why the background has to be so flatly dark and the tonal arrangement so low-keyed, too dark and low-keyed for the "Eureka," title. Irizarry's "Cockfight" also is low-keyed in contrast, though lighter in tonal arrangement than Marin's painting, therefore happier, but not as contrasty as the cockfight subject demands.

Well represented with a vivid, colorful, tactile and highly-contrasted "Quebradillas, '74" is Luis German Cajigas. Three water colors by Alberto Ortiz Collazo combine sensuous color, technique, and texture with imposed neolithic or Taino-Indian-geometry in a Puerto-Rican-synthesis, sensuousness predominating. An excellent serigraph by Lorenzo Homar was made from his colorful "letrista" original design for the second (1972) biennial catalog. An old (1959) favorite serigraph of "San Jose Church Square" represents Manuel Hernandez Acevedo in this show. Its colors have mellowed very well.

Alfonso Melendez Arana shows some Paris scenes with the nice color quality and good composition expected of him. Barg Mayol never fails

ART

ings At Maria Rechany Gallery



Formas de palos by Luis Hernandez Cruz

with his "Clowns." I wish he could tempt himself into doing something way out of line, for a change.

I wish the same about Olga Albizu. Her brassy saturated color patches, most of them similar in area, all of them parallel to the picture plane, negate her old teacher's theories of "push" and "pull" and chancy play with the painter's materials. Hans Hoffman stood for more variety. So did Mondrian vary his areas more than Olga does, even when he limited his planes to parallelness, as Olga does. If she should build constructs, even vague totems, or suggest some whirling motions, or displacements of her usual planes, her compositions might gain. Lorenzo Homar's letrista color patches are better.

Repetition of figurative forms such as those mentioned (by Irizarry, Marin, Cajigas, Ortiz Collazo, Arana, Hernandez Acevedo and Bart Mayol, even Balossi) is quite passable in art when accompanied by variations of technique or of tonal and color arrangements or of formal design, aided of course by nature's infinite variety in landscape and human figurations. Repetition is more obvious in Olga's abstract spatulaed lucubrations.

A painter in this show who is unnecessarily curing himself of "repetition," since his previous compositions were always very varied and his color always handsome, is Hernandez Cruz. His present works are still abstract

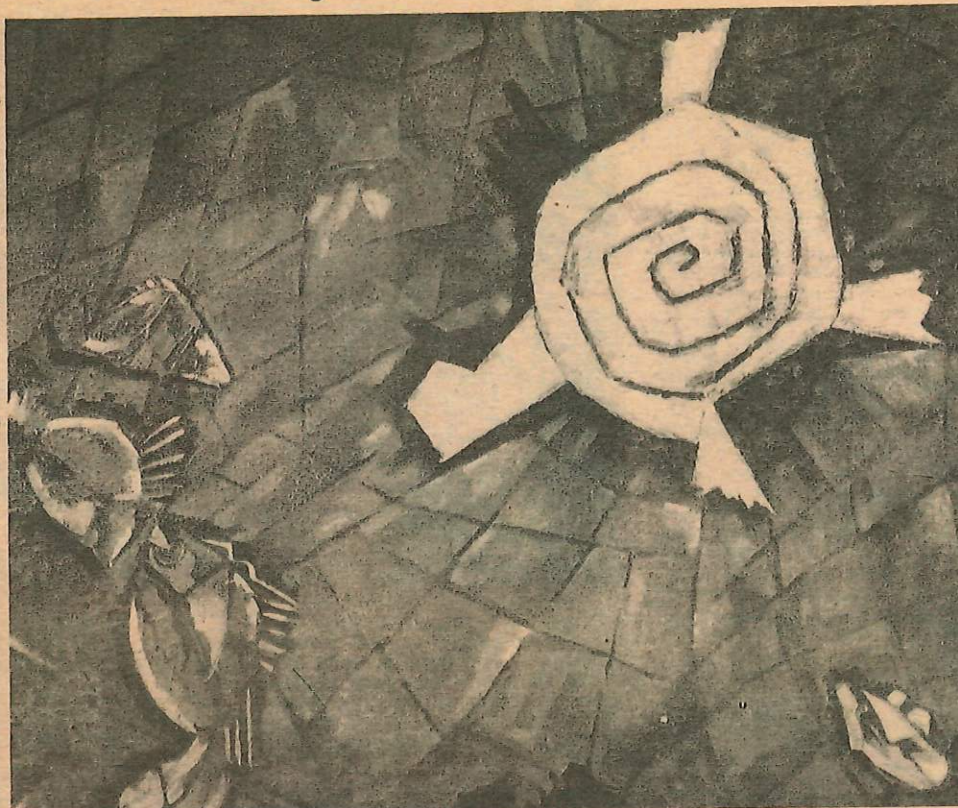
but more sharply contoured than before, influenced no doubt by his serigraphic film works and something inside. His color is harsher, less atmospheric than before, though he is modulating it better in his latest works. I hope it means the "something inside" is being solved or accepted.

Also, emergent totemic constructs begin to affirm themselves in Hernandez Cruz's paintings now, instead of the old lyrical landscapes which were punctuated with vague signs floating around, like musical arrays. His work is semigeometric now, still tentative because it is in the process of becoming. He searches for a synthesis as he nears the middle point of his life and his career. I wish I could say the same about all Puerto Rican artists. Nothing ventured, nothing lost and nothing gained, we will soon be in arrears!

Of course, search for novelty per se is not the answer either.

In this respect Noemi Ruiz shows a definite growth: she has left behind her repeated mandala designs. Her present work, though against a flat unmodulated terracotta background, shows more play with forms, more fanciful greys, more variety of spatial relationships. A great personal interior and physical growth shows in her work.

Jorge Rechany also dared once. He stopped producing his academic impressionism of student days to, con-



"Silvery Turtle" by Jorge Rechany

struct sturdily countoured and colorfully modulated figures against flat backgrounds. This sudden change plus the reasonably erotic note bespoke of passing the mid-point in his career. Lately, the backgrounds are a little too flat, the figures hastily (not livingly) modulated in their always nice color. Time to search and research again, break forms and colors up again, if only for exercise. He seems to be aware of the problem as is shown by his recent "Silvery Turtle" caught in a net along with some fish, a work based on a poem by Pales Matos. His Naguabo landscape is another salutatory exercise in simple flat colors. It is important to be one's own "doctor." Congratulations, Rechany, Noemi and Hernandez Cruz.

A superb sketch titled "Infinite World" by young Jorge Luis Rodriguez is a very promising work, briskly brushed, nicely composed and with a warm ivory atmosphere.

Beyond the above Puerto Rican painters I was struck by two works by Juan Garcia Segovia. He teaches at the Art Students' League and it was his 8 to 13 year old students who in four hours painted 20 five by five foot murals in the newly inaugurated Sixto Escobar playgrounds facing the sea. His work enters a higher realm in his "Restaurant Date." A man is hectic as he waits for his date. His masklike face, the masklike faces of the spectators, create a surreal tension. The formal architecture of his normal work begins to decompose too, in a

rare reality. A rare dreamlike reality is also seen in his "The Prohibited House." In another picture of people with carnival masks, the tension is lessened; it's just a normal carnival scene. His flatly applied colors seek no tactile values but do search for hue modulations within a general tone of medium lightness. This tone of half-way illumination between absolute darkness and absolute light helps create the unreal atmosphere. I hope it isn't just the use of permanent pigment's "modular" colors which decides the Number Five or Number Six tone in his black-to-white-tonal-scale. I hope he searches the many hues in one tone with a purpose at heart.

A similar tonal scale and color range is used by Jose Cassado in his straight-forward portrait of two sad gentle "Boys from Llorens Torres," with its nice painterly greys and colors more modulated than Segovia's but not as clean cut in effect.

On the way back to San Juan I saw the "toad-stools" or "turtles" aligned on the esplanade in front of the new Condado Convention Hall. The "coquies" by Lopez del Campo would have had a more varied expression, would have been more comfortable to sit or sleep on, and would have been more sensuous to the touch. The "toad-stools" seem cold and slippery. They may look nice on a very warm dry day, or with nude nymphs or elves playing around them. But the police won't let them.