

Puerto Rican Semi-R

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
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Whenever I have insisted on the tripartite quality of our psychic insular self as manifested in our extremely noisy master game of political status, some of the readers may have wondered, "But is it art?"

For two centuries, the options have been independence and statehood as thesis and antithesis with a tentative search for a synthesis in the autonomy called commonwealth. A fourth idea, Socialism, is immanent in each of the three options.

Our search for a synthesis in life and political status has produced an art fit for the majority of our voters, that is, a semi-realistic, very formalized art fit for the conservative leftist Statehooders and the rightist Populares. What's missing, except in the work of a very few artists such as Carlos Raquel Rivera and in the water colors of John Balossi, is a sonorous Independentista expressionism. Yet most of our artists are Independentistas. How come?

Is the American Army repressing our emotions? That is a myth.

It is the forever-tentative search for a classical synthesis which seems to explain our art and us as a people during the past few centuries. Even our Indians seem to have been that way. We are not now, nor have we normally been an "either-or" kind of people, as the Americans, Spaniards or the Mexicans are. They produce a strongly contrasted art.

Being as decisive as they are may be most admirable at times. Imagine. Mexico has only one political party; Spain almost always one dictator; the United States has only two political parties. We have a rainbow politically, but not in painting. But we have been decisive in art twice, in two four year periods in our history. Once, from 1950 to 1954 when the Independentistas were strongest in votes and while we were creating our ELA (or Popular) constitution, we were decidedly social-realistic, almost expressionistic, in our art.

And from 1966 to 1970 during the Popular Party split, our artists sought safety in geometric hard-edged minimalism. Statehood Ferre came to power temporarily, as if with our smooth, large and very formally structured canvasses. Being decisive is a temporary thing.

History is long-lasting. So we normally opt for "either" and for "or." Why not? We prepare for the siege of history. In our eternal search for an awaited, classical and historic synthesis between emotion (the independent Dionysiac creative id) and formal unity (the Apollonian structural statehood idea or Super Ego), we wait, provisioned.

Both poles belong to us. Both are within, so we don't want to let go of any pole. Ay bendito, why should we cut part of ourselves off? But on recognizing the possible pitfalls of each pole (or party or manifestation of the

self) we build our synthetic construct with the best points of both.

At this moment, our construct, according to the number of votes, seems to value Apollo's formality above the wild noises of emotional Dionysos. Thus we now feel both reasonably "free" and definitely "associated" in politics and very formal and somewhat expressionistic in art, etc., etc. Are we an "etcetera?" I don't think so.

We are most definite at remaining indefinitely on the search for our synthesis in a dutiful professional way. Dutifully faithful to each party concerned. Our artists, mostly Independentistas bow to the collective will. As we synthesize between both poles, we tell ourselves it is not fence-straddling evasion but a fence surrounding projection. In our art as well as in our life. We may be right, that is, if we are preparing for a future game.

The Greeks would understand. Between their very formal geometric and archaic period of art and the quite emotional Hellenistic one, their classical art was born. Yet "classical," too, are the poles apart. It is thus with Puerto Rican painting. Geometry and semi-realism, are combined at once. The Latinists also would understand. Extreme goodness can be bad and extreme badness good, if each overshoots its mark. So it is safest to choose a point between and that's where the good art lies. Except that instead of choosing a point between, we opt for all points between, all at once, with none completely rejected.

Yes, we prefer to play it eclectically safe in our art, as in our politics and life. Play it safe out of fear? No. Only out of caution. A wisdom. This wisdom is the result of thousands of years of life on our isle, a crossroads isle. Hurricanes come and go; we safely stay on. Indians invade the Atlantics (You must remember that trip: I saw you there); Spaniards invade the various Indians; the French, English and Dutch invade us. We stay safely on. The Americans invade us and try to change our present language. We do stay on. Over the centuries we stay on, like a bad weed if you wish, like a bad dream — and breed, if you please. The fact is we stay on. It seems to have been more important for us to keep all our parts and parties together over the centuries than to be particularly decisive or selective in any century so far.

What kind of wisdom is this? Why do we insist on keeping all our gods, parties and poles together? Something within us holds all our guts together as if in expectation of a future confrontation. What can it be?

A similar experience was had by many crossroads peoples in the Mediterranean and other in-between-lands whenever the Ice-Age Mantles came, pushing the Northerners south, and then receded, pulling men north. Also whenever the vagaries of the



