

# ART

## Alicea at the Pitirre

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Special to the STAR

Somewhere in the innards of the Condado's whalish Convention Hall is the Pitirre Gallery. It's on your left as you enter the front esplanade beyond the trafficmarking "turtles." "The Pitirre," one month old and named for the Puerto Rico national bird, merits your inspection and has good bargains now. Its clients are natives mostly, surprisingly; a few tourists flit by.

Once in "The Pitirre" you will find a "guaraguao" in attendance from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.: Heriberto Gonzalez or Carlos Irizarry. The two artists take turns at making a go of their new creature as they once did in the "Centro Nacional de las Artes" with its "Guaraguao Gallery," which is still extant. The Centro Nacional, however, ceased to function because too many guaraguao fought over it, even before any pitirre came in. The pitirre bird, as every Puerto Rican knows, attacks its enemy the much larger Guaraguao, the Puerto Rican hawk.

On the Pitirre's walls is a very good exhibit of graphic works by Jose R. Alicea who is a nightingale (or ruisenor) at heart because he does his excellent thing inside his nest whenever he feels like it without invit-

ing the press or recording for replay. Alicea does his graphics because he is in harmony with his universe, like the nightingale. As for those high-flying pitirres and guaraguos, they are his subjects in his current "Refranes" series of color woodcuts, from which I like his "Cada guaraguao tiene su pitirre." Also typical of Alicea's close-to-the-ground nightingale-processes is "Vale mas ser cabeza de raton que rabo de leon" plus "Al mejor cazador se le va la liebre." Nightingales do suspect heights.

When I complained to Alicea that the color of his "Refranes" was illustrationish, that is thin or washed out as if it were for old-fashioned realistic children's books, he answered: "A proverb is an old-fashioned reality pattern. The work itself tells me how to proceed." Guaraguao and pitirres proceed regardless of the reality, but nightingale-Alicea allows the work to decide for him. Quite a communion between the man, his reality and his work! But I still think the colors in the "Refranes" are a mere illumination of the work, not good enough as color.

Much better and happier in color, composition and drawing in his 10 years-old woodcut series of Aesop's Fables. Very verry, Japanesey and rhythmic are "La perdiz y los gallos" and "La Zorra y la Cabra." All of them are very good illustrations.

Alicea's best work in this show is in the innards of the Pitirre Gallery. The quality is first rate; the prices are surprisingly low, considering the reasonably reduced editions and the quality. Alicea is not hungry for money, nor is he excessively possessive of his work, as some artists are, thereby sending prices up. He is an artist committed to bringing art to his people.

Most interesting to me because of their innovative compositional sense within Alicea's normal style are "Homenaje a Oscar Collazo," "Mujer de Vietnam" and "Homenaje a Morandi." Alicea himself chose the Oscar Collazo piece to represent him in the cancelled 1976 Graphics Biennial. It is composed of red-lined rectangles within the original rectangle of the paper resulting in a crystalline multi-faceted composition, suggestive of many simultaneous realities and eternal returns on one single moment of work.

His haunting "Vietnam woman" is in yellowy-browns produced by dry-point. Her large face is offset by a beautiful and small rectangular etching and relief print in red with two thin-blue and thin-white borders. The small purplish-red print shows the same woman lying dead, mourned by her son, existing inside the red-white-and-blue rectangle inside the broader mustardy world. Nice sugges-

tive composition and color indeed. "The flag's colors," said Alicea.

As for his engaging "Homenaje a Morandi," a still life of bottles with two imposed rectangles, I asked Alicea how come Morandi? The famous Italian painter was no heroe or social-realist, he was strictly a painting specialist. All he painted were bottles and more bottles. Alicea answered most typically, "I admire his consistency; he did what he wanted, always. He didn't submit to the public; he never commercialized himself." That's the simple credo of the nightingales!

"Soles Tainos" is a very good, strong and sophisticated series of large plates based on Puerto Rico Indian pictographs. They suggest the sun emblem of the chief's guanin and other paternal, even Oedipic connotations. I wonder about Van Gogh's fascination with painting suns, candles, lanterns and other sources of light; he was trying to kill his father's memory and power over him. Alicea's father was a shaper of metals in New York City; his mother left him and New York to settle in Barrio Machuelo of Ponce to raise our artist who was then about 4. Alicea did visit his father later while studying in the states. A visit is a visit only.

Constant in Alicea's work is the resonant quality of his series of "baquines.. (wakes) which by now num-

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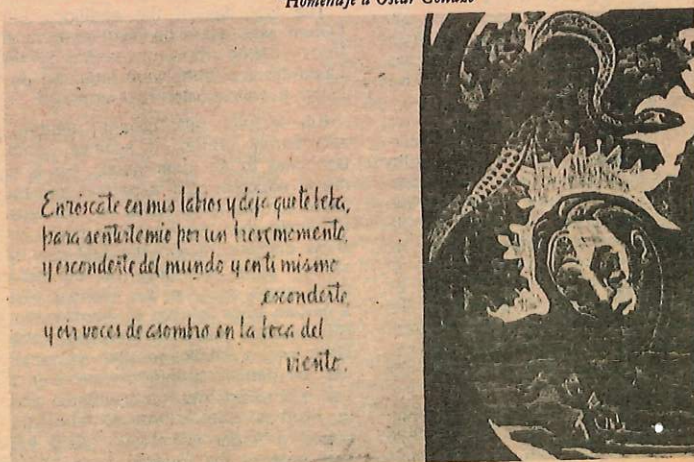
"Mujer de Vietnam"



"Homenaje a Oscar Collazo"



"Baquino—El Rosario"



"Rio Grande de Loiza"