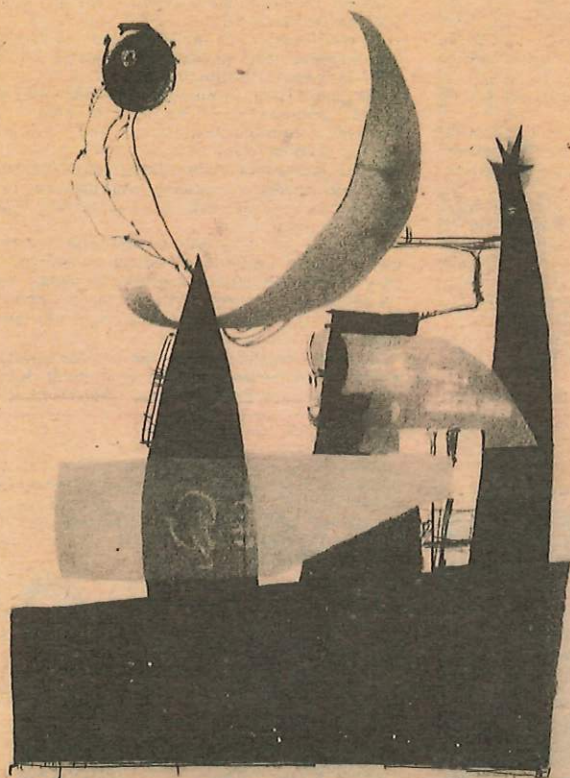


Oct. 30, 1977

ART

Four hunters



"Composition" — Rodriguez Diaz

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Juan Ramon Velazquez is a mighty hunter of drawings with his lead pencil to which he is lately adding other kinds of sensuous ammunition. Go see his present exhibit at the vestibule of San Juan's Capitol next to the Senate.

Juan Ramon told me he might like getting a new public. A small part of it was there, as were the normal Capitoline winds and some important-looking figures.

Juan Ramon solemnly says painting doesn't attract him—yet he claims he has found color through his present drawings using nice warm washes. His drawings thus gain gayety, variety and very sensuous textures.

Juan Ramon's claim that painting is not at issue in his work reminds me of those hunters who solemnly claim to be on vacation from hunting bisons or status issues, and then they manage to bag plenty. Accidentally, or on purpose? Romero Barcelo knows.

As for Juan Ramon, he insists that at issue are his drawings now, with their nice warm ochres, earth reds and their darks against white paper. He claims he doesn't like greens or blues in his works, though he does like them in the works of others.

Neither is his age at issue 27 years old. He expects to be judged by his works, not his age. We art commentators do tend to split artists into two groups: the old-arrived and the arriving troop—whereas Juan Ramon is an individual shooter. He happens to have arrived in my book, is adult now as Venus was adult

on the very moment she was born—one of those self-made spirits.

I kidded Juan Ramon about forsaking his UPR degree in Commerce, to become self-taught in art. Was it really true? "Well," he said, "I have drawn a lot, and I have listened about drawing a hell of a lot, and seen even more. I used to like Bacon: not so much now. Then Alcantara, though maybe not as much as I thought. I have looked and looked. Other artists, stalwarts, including Cuevas, have been mentioned as his 'turos'."

That's more training than Venus got before she was all there.

Juan Ramon is one of the few artists in Puerto Rico who isn't, or hasn't been afraid of leaving empty spaces in his works. His lead pencil "presences" of enigmatic matter in countless fold shave acted as misty islands and peninsulas which he establishes quickly with a few initial lines within the white sea of the paper. Why doesn't he suffer from Nature's horror of empty spaces? Nature, like Jose Rosa and too many artists, likes to fill her "pictures" completely. Juan Ramon's answer to my question is beautiful: "Empty space speaks for the rest."

Thus he sees the concept of negative spaces and positive spaces, "figure" and "ground" in a picture, as a dialogue between them. Hans Hoffman, one of my teachers and the grandfather of modern American painting, spoke of the "push" and "pull" elements in composition. The oriental Ying and Yank are ever at work in art—the masculine and the feminine elements, doric and ionic styles, etc., in both open and closed compositions.



"Renaissance" — Juan Ramon

"Look at this play with volumes" Juan Ramon continues, "look at these very small facial features here, almost lost, they are so small in this drawing; now compare them to this enormous ear. They form a face. I call him Filipino, then I do a series on him, he is the principal character in a serial novel titled X and here they are: Filipino, Filipino Rey, sueños de Filipino, and others to come."

Nature creates in series, and uses millions of spermatozooids to guarantee one life. Juan Ramon got married a year ago, his work is more sensuous now; quite a few of his present compositions are erotic within their misty-veiled appearance. He is discovering sensuous colored washes which envelope sensuous touchable textures as a new visual experience for him.

He keeps his dreamy soft contours, but his volumes now flow more naturally, less haunted by guilt, less angular than his previous 1975 drawings of fetal and skeletal presences in tragic solitude and existential anguish. His washes tend to be misty-rosy now, as a sign of the future, I hope.

But one thing worries me: the recurrent duality of lead pencilled drawing and textured color in one single work. Two visual experience are joined by Juan Ramon's will so far—his will and his unifying but limited palette of discrete colors. They do hang together reasonably.

In only one of the present works do the ochre-rose washes form one completely unified work which, significantly, leaves no empty spaces of white paper, as if Ramon like nature, were beginning to hate empty

Juan Ramon Velazquez, Angel Rodriguez, Manuel Garcia Fonteboa, Carlos Torres



"Shoeshine Boys" — Torres



"Recuerdo de Ilusion" — Garcia Fonteboa

spaces or wanted to people the earth. I don't blame him, for his wife is pretty.

But if all his future work turns out like that one, then Juan Ramon will have to admit that painting is at issue, that he is beginning to be a painter. He has to make up his mind.

Artists can't fool themselves, or their art fools them; just as foolish politicians will be fooled by their politics or the people in the end.

Angel Rodriguez Diaz is a good painter, has been since time began—but now he is hunting for drawings just because drawings are there, and with drawing so far he is only in also-ran. Of course he is only in his first forty drawings, of which he boldly exhibits 21 now, at the UPR (Library, Special Projects Hall). I have told him to study the Julio Rosado del Valle and Juan Ramon Velazquez drawings in their respective exhibits extant now.

Yet Angel's drawings are not bad, though he doesn't bother to give them titles as he does to his careful paintings, significantly. His numbered drawings are sequential exercises with the medium: ink and water, sometimes stopped by wax crayon, some charcoal and pen and ink lines here and there. He glories in the abstract expressionistic chase, nicely records his gestic feelings in the catalog, is in love with "man-chas", the stains, blots or spots the flowing materials make on his white paper, which by the way dares to remain white and empty in many places. He too is not afraid of empty spaces: very good. Less is more in art.

A baroque hunter is Manuel Garcia Fonteboa, at least in his drawings, as they can yet be seen in the La Galeria del Callejon in San Juan. His drawings could be posters in front of theater marquees advertising wonderful sensual acts and spells to be cast by gnomes, actors and pecking birds beyond translucent screens or scenographic paradises.

There is a disciplined parallelness in Garcia Fonteboa's lead pencil lines with which he draws his principal subject matter, then he liberates himself with wax crayons and pounces to surround this steadily drawn grey pencil matter with swirling swabs of color, for a very free baroque effect.

The contrast between magic and control, salsa and control, both captured in each work, makes for popularity. No wonder he sold so many drawings in the show. But he should beware of hunting from the same angles always, or the bison will get wise to him and go away.

Garcia Fonteboa's serigraphs are a different matter: the quiet controlled energy in them in tremendous, perhaps because he too is not afraid of leaving empty spaces in his work except when under his baroque-flood influences.

His serigraphs are a finer kind of bison because those haunting figures seem to believe in God, or to search for Him amidst the misty, granular films of matter which Garcia Fonteboa interposes in front of them as if to test them, as if he were God too, very sure of himself, at least with wax crayons and tusche ink on the serigraphic film.

Is he testing himself? I'd like to know.

Carlos Torres captures bison as they are, realistically, with no tricks except those necessary for water-color renditions. His "acuarelas" can now be seen in the Condado Gallery, Condado Convention Hall.

They are good water colors, soft, moist and luminous except when he goes into illustrative details such as the small waves in the bay, his photo-realistic shoeshine boys, or his too-strong touches of red and ochres. His blue-and-green spaces and houses are beautifully atmospheric.

Notice "Cruzar el Charco" with its broad, bright sky crisply rendered lancha, though spoiled by the overworked water effects. I loved his "Verdegall" la Perla: it seems moist from the sea, and I was especially touched by his old tree trunks which I also used to paint.

The old tree trunks seem to speak for Carlos Torres. He too acts old when he is only 35. He also acts quietly always; yet he is a regular magician, a member of their "society" in America. He works now at the Fransican "Centro Nacional de las Artes."

If he can conquer the water in his landscapes, or avoid it altogether, and if he can put flesh and reds under cool soft atmosphere, he will become one of our finest water colorists. Normally our water colorists have produced impressionistic works, which are easier to do than those by Carlos: he dares to use few simple broad messes of very transparent yet saturated color. I hope he keeps it up, especially if he partially breaks away from the illustrative photo-realistic kind to drawing in his figures. His good color is against it.