



1955 by Lorenzo Homar



1962 by Rafael Tufino



1967 by Isabel Bernal

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is necessary for Puerto Rico. If it didn't exist we would have to invent it along with the concept of God itself.

The concepts of peace and harmony in art as among men of goodwill; the togetherness of all members of the family unit and of all families within our nation as of all the elements in an art work; the rhythmic interplay of the male and female principle in art which also applies to the family for the children's sake and should apply to all activities of the state as well: all the splendor of possible human happiness is there.

La Fortaleza is bountifully attired right now for Christmas visitors with northern pines and "glitter-snow". You may visit any day from 8 to 4. A humble little manger lies in a corner since it is part of our culture. I hope it shines for Christmas for the coming of the Child.

And then there is the art show.

There have been three art shows since the summer in La Fortaleza's inner patio and more are coming. The first was of the handsomely colored experimental works by Avillo Cajigas, of which First Lady Kate Romero bought some samples for La Fortaleza walls. The second was a bright collective exhibit put up by Coabey Gallery which I hope produced some sales for the artists. And now there is an exhibition of Christmas posters (which are not for sale). Some of them are collector's items.

In La Fortaleza, too many doors and arches in the patio interrupt our eyes as we go from one art work to

another, but the masonry against which the works are hung is all in unifying white. Dona Ines de Munoz Marin when first lady, started the Fortaleza art exhibits. They used to occupy half of the patio walls and three inner rooms which are now offices. The exhibition spaces were handsomer then, but the exhibits weren't frequent enough.

The present La Fortaleza art exhibit is of Christmas posters by the Department of Education's Division of Community Education, which, founded in 1949, has produced two Christmas posters each year since 1950: one poster as its annual greeting to our people, and another to advertise the special Christmas programs put on by the division in rural and urban communities.

The division posters are much more painterly and colorful than those produced by the Institute of Culture nowadays. A show of institute posters produced in the last 10 years closed recently at the Institute's Museo del Grabado on the San Jose plaza. The works displayed were, all excellently professional but the designs were mostly in Jose A. Rosa's style, as book page designs, or tapestries. They are closed as compositions, very conscious of and parallel to the picture plane, using mostly tertiary colors with little love for saturated color and less for textural or tactile values and most times no deep space including three dimensional modelling of figures. Antonio Navia's posters with figure designs were an exception. He is a painter.

In contrast, the division posters, designed mostly by out-and-out painters who are not exclusively graphic

designers, contain more diagonals and consequently deeper space with more three dimensional modelling of the figures. And many times they have pleasing textural effects for tactile credibility and all of the above with full saturated color. Jose Rosa should study this exhibit for future growth.

It has been said that some of the posters in the early and middle 50's had a special magic which is partly missing now. But I remember we division artists didn't have to punch time-clocks then. Neither were we paid for overtime hours but if the job demanded it we would often sleep on the print tables overnight. That's just not done officially nowadays. Another difference was that the individual's work was laid out for the entire year, not one by one and at the last minute which happens too often now for many reasons.

In any case the work done in those years was more mature. Or was it that we had more illusions and were less cynical than now? Many artists were even allowed to paint their private favorite-cause posters—many of which are priceless now and other works on government time, provided his yearly work quota was kept to. The Comptroller now stops such free arrangements. Result: the aesthetic values may decline and eventually the dollar values of the aesthetic values too.

Of course, free spirits such as Lorenzo Homar and Rafael Tufino set their own course, but they have left the government service now, significantly.

Notice the painterly qualities of two priceless works at La Fortaleza,

both out of print and therefore quite expensive to buy if you can find them at all: the 1955 "Virgen de la Monserrate" by Lorenzo Homar, and the 1962 with santos by Rafael Tufino.

The Homar design here is front-facing and parallel to the picture plane, as Jose Rosa's designs are normally. But the Homar Virgin is quite tactile with its textured treatment and simple three-dimensional modelling. The result is more credibility as a plastic presence on a wall, to attract the public eye to the simple front facing message against the flat red background. Color can be austere and tonal contrasts are sufficient in such simple but large-sized figure and ground relations.

The Tufino poster is more baroque, contrasted, and free-wheeling with its broken color, its textures and its spatial relationships. The exuberant perspective calls attention to itself, as do the textures but the message is quite readable and the visual memory after seeing the poster is one of happiness. Jose Rosa need not go as far as Tufino has dared to go here into perspective, textures and color.

Also very satisfactory even into its dramatic background is the 1976 Tufino design—done free-lance for the division's Christmas greetings: a group of colorful street musicians move diagonally against an almost black ground. No textures are necessary here: the high contrast, color saturation and expressive figures call great attention to themselves and the simple message.

The 1977 Christmas Program poster is by Jose Melendez Contreras who is soon to retire from the division. He uses blue, greens and purple

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1968 by Antonio Maldonado



1970 by Manuel Hernandez Cruz



1971 by Antonio Maldonado

POSTERS

and thoughts
by Felix Bonilla Norat

reds to express a powerful Puerto Rican singer-musician. His 1972 program poster uses blues also, offset by a discreet orange. The 1967 work by Isabel Bernal presents a charming landscape, a colorful and well composed small town in the hills. She seems to do these towns very well, with the right amount of nostalgia. Lysette Rosado, Analida Burgos and Jose R. Alicea are also quite poetic with landscapes out in our hills as you can see now in their present Coabey exhibit. Coabey, on San Sebastian St,

off the Plaza San Jose, is open until 5 every day. You could visit it after La Fortaleza, which closes at 4 P.M. Galeria Guatibiri in Rio Piedras near Amalia Marin Street, and Galeria del Callejon in San Juan with its charming small pictures for Christmas merit your visit, as does the Botello Gallery with its present collective exhibit.

A different landscape, of urban houses with a central child is seen at La Fortaleza show in the 1970 Christmas Greetings by Manuel Hernandez Acevedo. As a primitive, he is

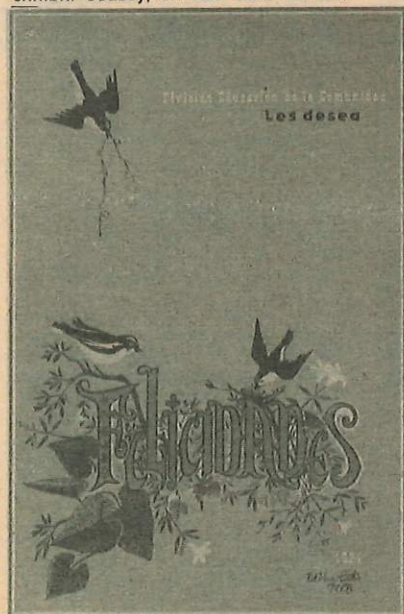
more refined in color than the Haitians and many of us too.

A nostalgic child looking at the Three Kings in a manger scene is quite rhythmic and painterly, if a bit sentimental, in the 1973 poster by Isabel Bernal. Also nostalgic for other reasons is Eduardo Vera's old fashioned garland vignette with small birds in the 1974 poster greeting. Nostalgic again is the file of "parranderos" going uphill to a lighted house with star in the sky as present

in Antonio Maldonado's 1968 program poster. His 1972 greeting presents a nice heartwarming child with doll seen against our hills.

I have pinpointed the painterly posters; other excellent but flatter designs are present, most of them with very good happy colors. Do go visit La Fortaleza.

Merry Christmas to all of you and to our Governor too. Thanks for La Fortaleza's art shows. May they continue!



1974 by Eduardo Vera



1976 by Rafael Tufino



1976 by Rafael Tufino