

Photographed by Jose Garcia

THREE

At Guaraguao

By FELIX BONILLA
Special to the STAR

The Guaraguao Gallery on Callejon de la Capilla in Old San Juan is what's left of the once very busy, "Centro Nacional de las Artes." Why did the Centro's many interesting theater, music, art and other activities and classes die one by one?

But, there is a Centro of sorts. Full of nooks and four stories high, the Centro is used by lonely artist souls who help pay for the water and the light. Plus there's the reasonably-permanently open Guaraguao Gallery.

Three artists are showing at the Guaraguao now. "Montesinos," "Ruiz de Porras," (just like that sans baptismal tags) and the more discreet Ruben Miranda. All three show lively work but of irregular quality and their very varied paintings hang helter-skelter on the gallery walls as if thrust on them impetuously, which they were.

Ruben and Ruiz de Porras are UPR products and they paint pell-mell all over time and space, ranging from Ruben's "Gnome" of the year 2001 of which we once before wrote in these pages (still strong here now and bright-colored though quite lineal) through his "Cuestionando," where time's clocks and death-phantomed-faces are "questioned" by stages, to his "Earth-Man," where man himself is turning into leafy biology. Quite a time-web-ridden cosmogony for a world is mostly blue colored, his brushstrokes long and thin of paste, his designs agile.

young man in his early twenties! His

Then we are ranged through Ruiz de Porra's graffiti, scratched on infinitely tactile walls — hurry-hurry-scratch-scratch-scratch — running from the fathomy "The Submarine and the Clandestine Are Alike", to "Domestication Begins With the Familiar Cup," and "Hunger Is for All," "Childhood Door" is Ruiz de Porras' most charming painting in this show. Within its scraggly lines it captures deep yet "modern" flat painterly space as if inside a magic kindergarten classroom.

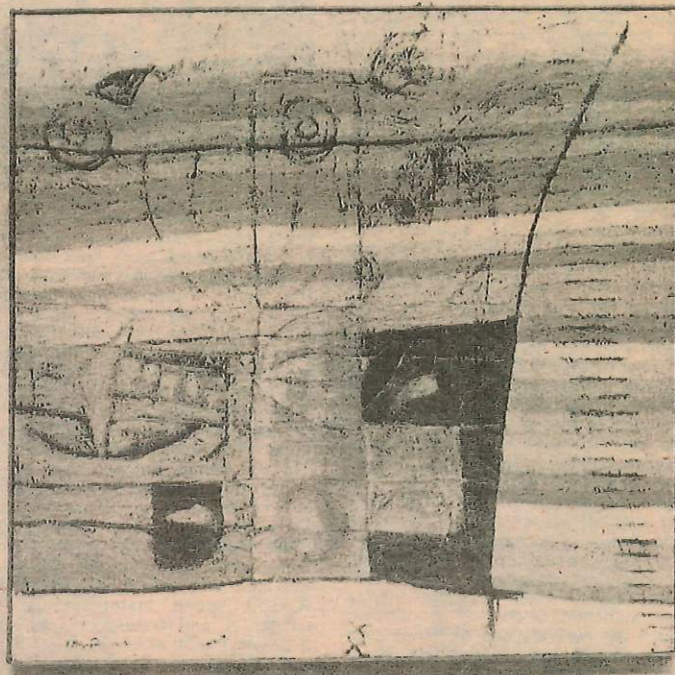
Both Ruben and Ruiz de Porras use line — but what a difference! Ruben's lines are usually boundaries between pointy flat planes but lately they form webs which capture clocks, skulls, leaves, filmy High-Renaissance-posed figures and gnomes, almost strangling all of them until only the lines seem to possess energy. This linearity may strangle Ruben's modicum of painterliness if he doesn't watch out.

Notice how his "Armadura" is so lineal that it will collapse if assaulted in battle and how his "Ritual" is choked by its umbilical cords. However, in his best two works, "Questioning" and "One Never Saw Oneself," the figure begins to disappear, some spaces are left empty in the picture plane, the painting gains weight, tactile values, and color.

Ruben's very good drawings, where linearity belongs best, suggest crumbling flesh and crumbling structures, as if on a final judgement day his world were to melt away. Ruben, at your age, why so foreboding? Leave larger areas empty in your paintings to see if the strangling foreboding feelings go away. The other way out is to face the problem head-on. Make the strangling botanical web become stronger and stronger and alone in the picture, its sole subject, until it dies or explodes. Or kills you in a way.

Unlike Ruben's, the lines in most of Ruiz de Porra's works act like handwriting, scratched into very heavily impastoed "walls." As if done by an incorrigible child on the sly, they act as graffiti, linear symbols or boundary lines at times. It is a child's world which is here recreated, but the mind behind it is as old as hunting. It's quite graphic, as can be seen in the suggestion of fathoms deep in "Lo submarino y los claudestino se asemejan," a very nice work.

But "Plaza" is Ruiz de Porra's best. It is quite broad as if wide-lensed or open indesign, painterly in execution, sophisticated in color, and with few lines. The lines act not as graffiti or signs but as accents near some of the planar boundaries. His "Ordenacion" is heavily ordered in nice strong colors, but very wildly even carelessly textured. "Schema," is simplistic in execution, with nervous repetitive scratched lines and bad



"Lo submarino y los claudestino"

RUIZ DE PORRAS

spatial divisions which show up in some works, whenever he climbs on his hurry-hurry-scratch fury. He rides on the Furies, they never ride him.

The third artist in the show, Montesinos, is almost double the age of Ruben or Ruiz de Porras. Montesinos started exhibiting about '55. He too is irregular in quality and too variegated in stylistic tendencies but his "Tayno XII" is a quite painterly work with simple, strong tonal contrast and colors. Its nice Miro resonances turned Puerto Rican and its interesting combination of painterly and linear signs, may bring him out of the curious simplistic Gromaire-like-pointillism seen in many of his primitive, mask-like, negroid compositions and even in his cannibalization of the "Mona Lisa." La Gioconda is seen here as a stylized crystalline shape strained against a loose floating impressionist world with no unity of style.

A nicer cannibalization is his "1136 del Prado" (El Greco's "Hombre con la mano al pecho"). Its painterliness and directness is another possible way out for his problem. He has to decide in favor of one style. I have pointed out two in this show which seem like good solutions. I also remember an interesting and colorful surrealist painting he presented to the Unesco salon. That is a solution also.

In a search for a "Puerto Rican" synthesis or style, Montesinos uses all



"Cuestionando"

MIRANDA

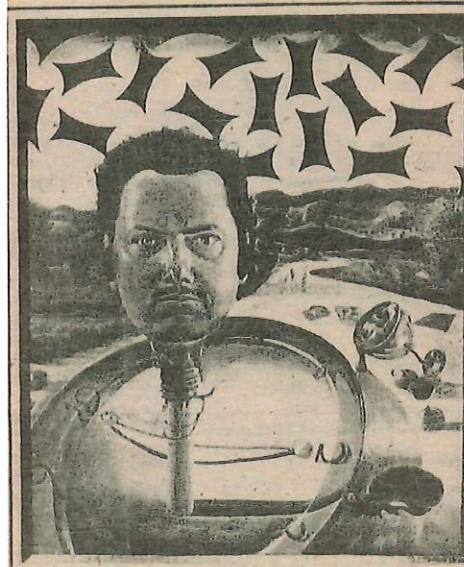
our various cultural influences from Europe to Africa to the Caribbean, much in the way don Monche Frade designed his "Faro de Colon" for the Santo Domingo Columbus-lighthouse competition. Don Monche put a completely different style or cultural influence on each floor of the lighthouse. It was terrible, architecturally even though it was rendered very tenderly and beautifully in color.

ANDA



"mbretierra"

MONTESINOS



"Diem"

LETTER

The letter on this page was inadvertently cut in half when it was run in the magazine of April 3. It also ran without an explanation or a headline. The explanation is that the letter is an answer by Leopold Kohr to Gordon Lewis' review of Kohr's book "The City of Man" which ran in the magazine of Feb. 13th. The STAR regrets the omissions.

LEOPOLD KOHR ANSWERS GORDON LEWIS

The trouble with Gordon Lewis' review of "The City of Man" (Sunday, San Juan Star Magazine, Feb. 13) is that, as so often, I don't know whom he attacks — the target of his criticism or himself. He accuses me that I invoke the past selectively, picking the facts convenient to my thesis, and promptly proceeds to quote the past selectively, picking the facts convenient to his thesis. I cite the splendor of ancient cities, he their cost in toil and blood and sweat and tears. I talk of beauty, he of its exploitation as if male chauvinist piggery were confined to capitalism.

Measuring his "words carefully" he says that "if a Stalin or Hitler had left behind them a finely planned city, Kohr might be half ready to forgive them their massive crimes," and promptly forgives a few paragraphs later both the massive crimes of Stalin's Soviet Union for having "retained intact the treasures of St. Petersburg," and the revolting victory executions of opponents and dissenters in socialist Cuba because "it is socialist Cuba that has for the first time engineered a real balance between city and countryside." Had he bothered to measure my words as carefully as his, he would have known that from Avestystwyth to Rio Piedras I have proclaimed in every pub and faculty club that, as far as I am concerned, there is no distinction between governments that kill, and killers who govern. It makes no difference whether the name is Hitler or Batista, Stalin or Castro. As an anarchist dissenter I would not have had much chance under either pair.

Lewis further castigates me for presuming that I am right and everyone else wrong, as if he considered it virtuous for an author to believe that he is wrong and everyone else right. If Lewis felt compelled to write his splendid volumes on the Caribbean scene, I venture to guess that he too thought that his interpretation was not wrong but right though some of his critics were convinced of the opposite. Moreover, anyone citing so lavishly from the works of others as both he and I are wont to do, can obviously do so only on the assumption that lots of others are right as well.

Gordon Lewis also thinks that I am a romantic. Of course I am. Rising from dust and ending in dust; coming from nowhere and dissolving into nowhere after a lot of expenditure, life

makes no sense at all for a rationalist. For an economist it is an irrational loss proposition. Only for a romantic does it make sense. But being a romantic does not mean that I hanker for the "uncivilized." Gordon Lewis himself expressed his enchantment after a visit to my medieval shepherd's cottage in the Cotswolds not only because he is himself a romantic as anyone can see who reads the glowing hymn to the beauty of Caribbean women in the concluding passage of his fascinating volume on Puerto Rico; he also was enchanted with it because he obviously realized that far from being "uncivilized," a sturdy medieval stone house must have given an English shepherd a housing standard which may not be as high as a farm hand's in socialist Cuba, but offers enough amenities to fill even a modern reformer determined to do away with the shepherd class with a nostalgic hankering for some of the latter's medieval fringe benefits.

Another point Lewis makes is that my heroes in city building are the Medieval Church and territorial aristocracy but that I fail to stress the immense wealth which supported their activities and scandalized everyone except presumably Leopold Kohr. He does not mention that my heroes as urban site selectors and aesthetes include also three other classes: the military, the inn keepers, and the slum dwellers. Indeed it is particularly the slum dwellers whom I have singled out for their unrivalled sense of urban beauty and location as he could have guessed from the subtitle to "The City of Man: 'The Duke of Buen Consejo.'" Like the late Gilberto Concepcion de Gracia or my many Puerto Rican architect and planner friends, Gordon Lewis should have been able without explanatory remarks to discern that my real hero is of course not the Duke. He might have been a Commissar. The hero of my story is Buen Consejo. And as to the scandalous wealth of the medieval church, its accumulation was due not because the church was the church but because, like the manor, she was in many instances the state (or like the state) in whose hands — for those who are disturbed by it — accumulated wealth is equally suspect whether it is Catholic, Calvinist, Arabic, Kremlinist, Capitalist, or Castrolite.

This is also why I have not used class — a particularly English obsession — as a tool of urban analysis. My volume is about The City of Man not The City of Proles. Nor have I for that matter dealt with the argument that the beauty of Greek cities was based on a society of slaves. Of course it was. Should I therefore de-

spise beauty? All societies except the smallest are societies of slaves. When Marx spoke of "wage slaves" he referred to the inhabitants not of Greece but of factories whose enslavement to assembly line and machine technology is as bad in socialist as in capitalist societies. This is at least what "fieldwork" in Soviet plants and experience in Canadian gold mines conveyed to me when I gained a living at 24 cents an hour not as a "pop sociologist" as Lewis suspects but as 20th Century wage slave pressing bloody drills into bloody rocks in subterranean tunnels dripping with condensation until I was deaf. I doubt whether life in Athenian silver mines could have been worse.

But this is irrelevant. The point is that slavery, irrespective of legal form and etiquette, is part not of the capitalist order nor of the socialist order but of the natural order. This is what Aristotle maintained who, contrary to Lewis' assertion, did not come out "in defence of slavery." He simply stated that there are "natural" slaves and "natural" free men. But he also stated that natural free men often find themselves in the category of legal slaves, while natural slaves are often found among those who are legally classified as free men. What mattered was who you were not what you were. I doubt whether I would have particularly minded being a slave in antiquity. As Horace said of the Roman master race: "Captive Greece made captive her rude conqueror." And when the philosopher Diogenes found himself a captive on the slave market of Corinth, he knew what he was talking about when he told his owner at the sight of a passer-by: "Hey, sell me to that man over there! He looks as if he were in need of a master."

True, none of this have I discussed. I could have written about slavery, the wealth of the rich, the poverty of the poor, the sinfulness of the Church, "the politico-administrative expression of powerful economic groups" as Lewis solemnly puts it, about multinational corporations, the misery of philosophy (pop and otherwise), and many other things for whose omission my old friend expels me from his teachers union as an irresponsible amateur. The trouble with my "slim" volume which is to Gordon's books what Twiggy is to Mae West, is that I did not mean to include any of these subjects. I meant to write my book, not his.

I explored the city not as an exercise in sociology, economics, or politics but as an experience of life in common. I wrote about The City of Man, not the City of God, the City of

the Sun, or the City of Socialism. What I meant to dwell upon was the essence of the good life as the ultimate target of human aspirations, not the boredom of classlessness; on the role of urban beauty, not of status. And beauty does unfortunately not permit the sort of fieldwork Gordon Lewis demands of me. It must be discerned. It does not need to be fingered — which does not mean that it is necessarily as shallow as "pop sociology."

Finally, calling himself "both a historian and political scientist" while dismissing my way of looking at history as "irresponsibly amateurish," Lewis states that he has "yet to hear that the English village or the American small town are notorious for their intellectual ferment." I cannot remember having written anything about villages in "The City of Man," though I have in another volume entitled Development Without Aid.

But if villages and small towns are really so lacking in ferment, how does he explain that only one British prime minister came from London; that Shakespeare hails from the rural charm of Stratford-on-Avon, or that the two greatest seats of learning in the British Isles are located not in the metropolis but in small provincial towns — Oxford (Lewis' own university) and Cambridge. My own home village in Austria has produced "Silent Night" (maybe indicative of its lack of intellectual ferment). Jesus was born in Bethlehem not the glitter of Jerusalem. And Gordon Lewis himself hails from a little mining village in the mountains of South Wales which has given the world Gordon Lewis. Is this really evidence that there is no gold in them thar' hills?

But don't get me wrong. As everything that flows from friend Lewis' sonorous Celtic pen, I thoroughly enjoyed his review of "The City of Man" not for what he says about me and, for good measure, about Ivan Illich too, but for his voluptuously poisonous way of saying it. I hope he won't mellow when it comes to writing my obituary. I would never forgive him. For though "we differ profoundly, we have in common, I like to think, a quality of intellectual civilization which makes it possible to be ideological enemies and personal friends at one and the same time." And to refresh his memory, the quotation, in spite of its similarity, is not from David Ricardo to Thomas Malthus, but from a cherished letter by Gordon Lewis to myself.

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