

ART

WHAT'S WRONG WITH

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Many artists have come to me with complaints about our art contests. Are they flawed?

Puerto Rico coddles its young with countless rites of initiation and incentives, both public and private maybe because we realize they are the ones who will end up paying for our government bonds. Cynical maybe? I honestly hope I am wrong.

How many mothers and fathers push their young into accomplishments for their own unsure stake in Social Security instead of for the sake of the young person?

Are our present rites of art initiation, the many art contests, efficient in producing full-fledged artists? Complete and autonomous within themselves? A complete and autonomous man is one who accepts responsibilities and if he fails doesn't seek excuses for himself but is ever willing to grant them to others, including his enemies — especially his enemies.

Logically, such men are produced by parents and institutions which are sure of themselves and have similar completeness and autonomy, otherwise all the acculturation rites, including those of initiation into life, are flawed and the flaws are implanted in the offspring. We have too many artists who seek or give themselves excuses.

So something is flawed. It is not amazing if the flaws show up in art since artists are quick on such up-takes.

All our art contests or rites of art initiation are flawed in one way or

another. I've been surprised how little we have all learned over the years we have held them. The reason is that each public or private contest is held apart from the others. None feels responsible for the others when all fulfill the same function for our young — and for art.

But worse still, in gathering material for this article, I've received the impression that each contest is held for each parent's reasons, name or stake in Social Security or survival, rather than for real love of the young. The sponsors need to hold the contests defensively. No wonder our young complain like their parents and seek excuses for themselves. The contests were held, as if for history's sake, in one moment. The next moment they are gone, the results ill exhibited, the art works treated as merchandise. Was there a rite? Was art's greatness upheld for the young?

If the contests were held in the absolute love of an absolute art in its most absolute quality, I'd not complain. In this connection, the also-flawed Sin Nombre contest was the one that did try to demand absolute quality within reasonable limits. Both the University of Puerto Rico plastic arts contest and the Ateneo Puertorriqueño Christmas festival awards were more "ritual" as to prizing quality. The ages of the contestants may be the reason; the youngest are the UPR contestants.

Let's pinpoint some of the flaws. Not to castigate wrongdoing or forgetfulness on the part of the UPR, the Ateneo or Sin Nombre but rather to see if we can design better rites of initiation for our young artists so that they feel loved for themselves, or, if not, loved for their love of art, and

not for selfish parental ritual or historical and other ideological reasons. It's not for love of Mom and Pop that such rites are held by any tribe.

The flaws in the various art contests are really nobody's fault; they are so natural. They are developed by the logic and the logistics of each power-center holding the contest. Most are anthropologically developed flaws.

The UPR is a very well established "power center" in Puerto Rico since ideas emanate from it and careers are fixed by it. The UPR's power is supposed to be orthodox, as needed by the official "establishment" of which it is a distinguished and salaried part. We take it for granted that the future's mutant possibilities are taken care of by the sheer energy of every minority group-of-minds in the campus and by the maverick individual professors who see through all power and can laugh.

The UPR, though matriarchally envisioned by our people who expect our own alma mater to protect their young while away from home, is nicely balanced psychically, as symbolized by its male tower in the middle of its campus and our many patriarchal professors both female and male. So it has produced a nicely designed art contest where male and female students participate, male and female jurors judge the prizes, and "history" itself is well served by the nice printed catalog complete with printed juror's decision the first time in our history that a jury's verdict is published in the catalog of works, a distinct service to the public, an incentive to play at being jurors, thus enhancing the educational process. Wonderful historical completeness.

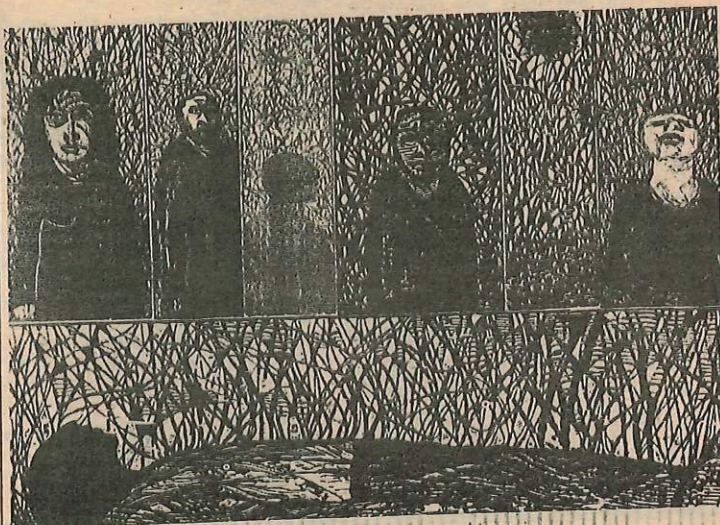
Parenthetically, in the above printed verdict context, the Sin Nombre exhibit comes out reasonably well since 1,000 humbly mimeographed copies of the verdict were available right away from opening night. The Ateneo's verdict was not read: for many very human and very understandable reasons, though prizes were awarded.

But now comes the big flaw of the UPR contest: once the event was presented to history and the public at large, the exhibition became a hot-house flower. It was open only at limited hours in limited premises with limited lighting. The exhibit itself is the real prize as far as art and the artists are concerned. Many of my 70 art appreciation students complain they haven't been able to see the show. Many can go only at lunch time or after 4 p.m. when the Music Room at the Student Center was closed but others found the place closed at the times in between. For night students, the show doesn't exist even if history's catalog says it does. The show should be open while the Student Center is open. It's easy to manage, especially in its hothouse premises with only one door. Of course, thieves could hide in the dim light of the room.

So, what can I assuredly tell history about the UPR contest? It did shine brightly on opening night and money did pass into winners' hands, happily. The rest can still be corrected and the closing date extended another week. Jorge Rigau, in excellent charge of cultural activities, though not the Student Center, has been known to cut Gordian knots. Here's one.

How was the Ateneo's contest flawed? It is not an out-and-out flaw

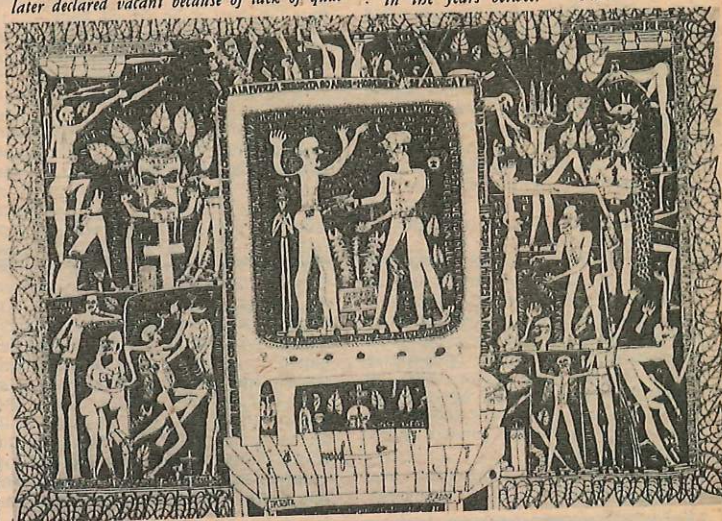
SIN NOMBRE



"El relatorio" by Luis Alonzo, graphics prize

The Sin Nombre review art contest was open to all Puerto Ricans. Jurors were Antonio Martorell, Myrna Baez and Rafael Rivera Rosa. More than 125 works were submitted, including 61 paintings, of which 13 were accepted. The painting prize was later declared vacant because of lack of qual-

ity or originality. The jury however praised the quality of the graphics submitted and asked that other intellectual activities be celebrated along with future exhibitions. They also recommended that the contest be held every two years with special exhibitions in the years between. — F.B.N.



"El asalto" by Jose Rosa, drawing prize

OUR ART CONTESTS

ATENEO



"Guaragua" by Isaias Mojica Valenzuela, first prize, sculpture



"La familia" by Roberto Thomas Torres, second prize, sculpture



"Uno nunca se vio" by Ruben Miranda, first prize, painting.



"Simplemente dos pilones" by Carlos Lopez Atienza, second prize, painting.

The 27th annual Ateneo Puertorriqueño Christmas Festival contest jurors were Jose R. Oliver, Jorge Rechany and Linda Gregory. Some 56 works were presented: 30 paintings, 8 sculptures, 7 drawings and 6 graphics. With the exception of only one contestant, the candidates were quite young, about college-student age. The poster and water color prize was declared vacant. Six paintings, two sculptures and one drawing were eliminated from exhibition. The prize in graphics was awarded to Rebecca Castillo-Velez for her "Erotic Dance." First prize in drawing went to Blanca M. Gari's "Nocturnal Visit" and second prize to Ruben Miranda for "Resena — Isla — Hong." Ceramics prize went to Cordelia Buitrago de Gonzalez for "Vasija." — F.B.N.

to award the prizes without a preliminary explanation by the jurors who are well known: Jorge Rechany, Dr. Jose R. Oliver and Linda Gregory. But the oversight may be a symptom.

Parenthetically again, notice that the patriarchal system of jurors was broken in the three "institutional" contests we are studying. Yes, institutional, since Nilita Vientos, editor of Sin Nombre, is also an institution in Puerto Rico and her contests are institutionalizing themselves through sheer quality, guts, and non-orthodox mutant energies. Her art jurors, gathered through her aide Ruth de Soltero, were Antonio Martorell, Myrna Baez and Rafael Rivera Rosa. Last year they were Lorenzo Homar, Maria Somoza and Ruben Moreira. The UPR jurors this year were Consuelo Gotay, Nelson Sambolin Bonilla and Manuel Garcia Fonteboa. Guatibiri Gallery's jurors for its recent graphics competition were Martorell, Jose Torres Martino and Myrna Baez. Quite a healthy pop plus mom, male plus female pattern is evolving in Puerto Rico. Good for the kids.

Anthropologically, the Ateneo's flaw is simple and dates back 2,000,000 years when man began to design himself as Man. Men were ever in charge of "foreign relations" for the tribe and of big-game hunting. Women had to care for the kids — and the elderly senators, or retired hunters of the tribe — at home or in such caves as are now factories, classrooms, laboratories and offices. Now they even carry home the big meat chunks from the supermarket hunting grounds, since man is ever busy doing relations.

Since the Ateneo always saw itself as the "foreign relations" presenter of our culture to others and other male oriented hunting activities, it is patriarchal in its archetypes even when it was headed by very feminine Nilita.

What happens in early societies when a hunter is told to do a job together with a peer group? He delegates power, assigns jobs and priorities, and in Puerto Rico, present president Eladio Rodriguez Otero hunts for money for the Ateneo. If any delegated "verdict" job is not

done, that's his fault, the tribe says. And now here I am saying unto him that his priorities decided that the Ateneo library came first then the theater, and therefore he has no proper art gallery yet to present a proper art exhibit, though I've seen the gallery plans and I approve.

So, until the plans become fulfilled, the Ateneo is flawed, for the visual arts as is the UPR's Student Center Music Room. The Ateneo does manage to have somebody in attendance throughout the day and evening activities, unlike the UPR.

The "Sin Nombre" contests are flawed through another anthropological factor.

Mutants or rebels, whom we know are very important for the future of the tribe, are naturally denied a power base initially as Nilita was denied "the Ateneo" and "Asomante." So she blithely developed "Sin Nombre." She needs no baptismal certificates to function—she functions. She has no base or gallery so she go the best physical plant of all the three we are discussing, the Institute

of Culture Hall in its Fine Arts Museum.

The Sin Nombre flaw is its polarizing or divisive influence on the tribe. Polarization of artists (who should be the mediums for their people's complete soul), for or against one particular non-art idea, regardless of what that idea is, no matter how fashionable that idea is, does divide Puerto Rico's artists. That's why I think it's wrong. Many artists don't dare enter the contests if they are not socialists. No matter how often I tell them that the jurors are Puerto Rican art professionals, they are afraid. Others, who are socialists, feel impelled to send out of duty not for art's sake. Both ways it's wrong for art since specific political ideas have short lives compared to art.

Thank our star, art today is most ecumenical, and for 2 million years art always dealt with man including his politics in general, though not in particular so Sin Nombre can cause no great danger. But they should let it be known that artists of all political ideas are welcome.

UPR PLASTICS ARTS



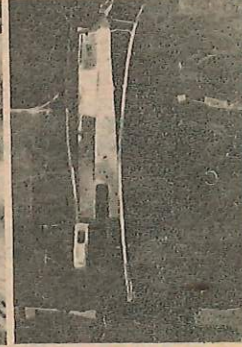
"Existo" by Arnaldo Roche, sculpture prize



"Buscando una vereda" by Arnaldo Roche, drawing prize



"Mano a mano" by Arnaldo Roche, painting prize



"Xipratmos" by Angel Luis Rodriguez, drawing prize

Jurors for the University of Puerto Rico Plastic Arts Student Contest were Consuelo Gotay, Manuel Garcia Fuenteboa and Nelson Sambolin. More than 40 works were submitted, of which 28 were exhibited including 11 paintings, 9 drawings, 5 graphics and 3 sculptures. The jurors decried the general lack of quality and quantity and cited many cases of careless execution. The graphics and the poster prizes were declared vacant. In their verdict the jurors called for the opening of a new contest category to include experimental art forms including film and asked for other intellectual activities to be held concurrently with future exhibitions. — F.B.N.