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ART

COLLOGRAPHY at the Gra

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to The STAR

At the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's Museo del Grabado Latino Americano on the San Jose Plaza in Old San Juan, an intelligent exhibit of "collographs" from the Pratt Graphics Center in New York is being held until June 6.

Do go to see them to exercise your fingertips when, naturally without touching the art works (which you can't anyway, they are under glass or plastic), you "feel" the pleasurable tactile sensations produced by this eminently texturollogical medium which also permits free use of color.

Both serigraphy and collography can be quite painterly in the above respect, though serigraphy normally uses full bodied paint and is more "touchable" than collography which uses thinner printing inks. Collography could use artist paints too if proper paint viscosity, drying time and printing time were played with. The resulting colors would be more permanent.

You can prepare a collographic printing plate in a hurry. On a firm flat base apply a thickened plastic glue or medium such as acrylic modelling paste or even sculp-metal. While still wet, impress countless texture-producing materials onto the flattened medium, including embroidery such as Myrna Baez uses in her fine works in this show, or metal coins, seals or the photographic printing plates you see in some of the other works. You leave such materials embedded in the medium, or you can lift them up after impressing their textured "presence" into the medium. You can gouge, push, pull and scratch the medium also, both while it is wet or after it hardens.

An infinite range of textural and drawing possibilities are at your command in this cumulatively "built-up" collographic printing plate.

Linoleum and wood are "raised" printing plates. They imply laborious elimination from the flat-printing-face of whatever areas you do not want to print. "Lowered" or "Intaglio" printing plates, mostly of metal, imply laborious elimination from the plate surface of what you do want to print. What prints is not the upper-flat-face as in linoleum, but the indented or in-cut or "in-taglied" parts of the flat-face. The intaglioed parts are carefully crammed with ink of appropriate viscosity while the flat-face is wiped carefully afterwards. The characteristic overall light gray tint of etchings is due to the impossibility of eliminating every trace of ink simply by wiping. So we use the effect for certain purposes, wiping selectively.

Collography can produce effects which combine the above processes. It can vary from the raised to the in-

taglied printing surface, depending on inking procedures and printing pressures and all of it from one single plate if so desired.

When dry-hardened, the built-up and impressed collograph plate can be inked quite freely to produce transparent and thick color effects. Some designs allow use of masks for localized inking in of various colors for one single printing. Or you can ink very freely and loosely for monotype effects. A monotype is a one-of-a-kind print in any medium which allows many charming variations from a normal multi-copy printing.

Since the collograph plate is built-up irregularly on the surface, it can tear the paper when printing pressure is applied. So the paper can be dampened beforehand and padding can be used behind it to soften the stress and to facilitate embossed effect, which are another great tactile characteristic of the medium.

The history of collography is very old in the Orient and in Europe under other names and crafts. I remember practicing it in Italy in 1938 to produce marbled effects on frescoes; then in New York after 1940 to produce (of all things!) tonal effects on tusche-greasy positives for serigraphic glue-and-photo-emulsion stencils. Other artists in New York were unto similar researches under W.P.A. sponsorships in graphics.

But nowadays, the official pioneer mentioned in Jules Heller's "Printmaking Today" is Glen Alps, "precursor of this new print medium" and featured in one complete chapter of the book. He is represented in the present show by two so-so works. We people who go into technical creativity produce only so-so works, esthetically.

Students who have studied "Printmaking Today" by Heller and Mary Ann Weininger's text on "Collography" should visit this exhibit. Various illustrations used in the books can be seen here in their original clarity. Witness "White Rock Boot House" by Dale Pierson and "Urban Fragment III" by Jim McLean. Read about each work as you see it. It's pleasurable educational. The nice tactile qualities of the works are revisited.

Besides Alps, Pierson and McLean, another "pioneer" present in this show is Clare Romano. She has gone astray in her work titled "Canyon" but does better with "River Canyon" with its dramatic yet subtle dark colors and red, and she is quite technically impressive with "Eternal City," using photo-effects, etching, coin imprints and collage effects within a reasonably unified vignette-type composition.

The three most impressive works in



"Lisa" by Dean Meeker

Photographed by RAFAEL H. TRIAS

hics Museum

this show are by John Ross, Renee Winick and Myrna Baez. Notice other Pratt Graphic Center artist names: Polansky, Romano, Gray, Ross, Summer, McSheehy, Stasack, Donneson, Rozman, Philbrick, Cline, Westerlund, Nama, Steg, Thangchalok and somebody called "Ramon." Quite a crossroads place. I go for crossroads places such as the Pratt Graphics Center which produce a reasonably homogenous body of works as presented in this exhibit. Many Puerto Ricans have gone to study at Pratt, many as scholarships students, including Myrna Baez.

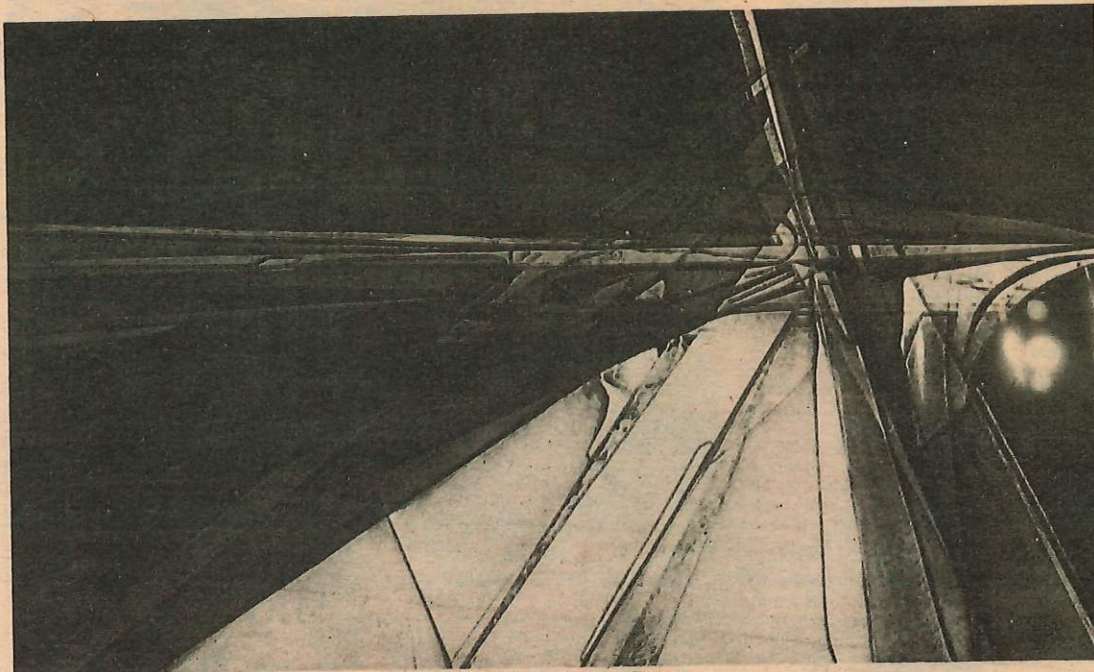
John Ross's "Monolith Valley, Wall Escampment" in four separate large prints could be joined to form a most impressive landscape mural. The natural monoliths look like nice tactile modern sculptures guarding Monolith Valley and form a very eminent physical landscape presence, a very touchable, kinds of primeval earthy matter.

Primeval glassy matter compressed as if by geological forces and pushed up and sideways is coolly touchable in Renee Winick's "No. 128." There is sonorous magic in these coolly-cutting crystalline formations arrested under an apocalyptic red sky.

And then, tender nostalgic lace and a reflected suffering woman's face, caught inside a small wall mirror, is seen in Myrna Baez' "Celaje." It makes me shiver. It's such a potent portent of a passing glancing "shadow." Whose Jungian "Shadow?" I don't know if it is of the woman in the mirror, or of the artist. The absolute command of tonal gradations creates an atmospheric involvement flooding all the nice touchable laces, the woman's flesh and the highlight on the mirror and its metallic frame. Myrna is more painterly in some of her graphic works than she is in some of her paintings. The shadow image is part of her other work in this show. Quite an interesting shadowy work and angst.

In passing, let me mention Ramon's "Inspiration Point, Idyll, Wild" as of a pointillist biologist tissue; Cornelia McSheehy's sexy symbolist "Dedication for Mannis Pinkwater;" Joseph Rozman's playful "Hong Kong Kolors;" Dean Meeker's wonderfully elegant "Lisa" with its very crisp gestalt, a nicely silhouetted profile torso portrait with touchable hair and coat.

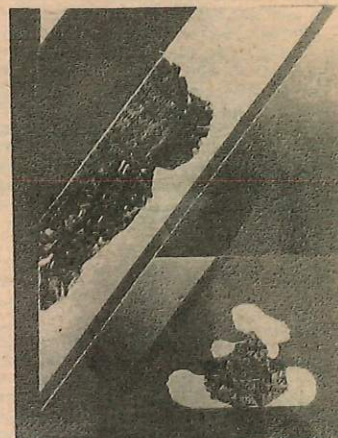
There is an ambivalent gestalt or figure-to-ground relationship in "Night Seascape" by Ithinol Thangchalok, combining negative and positive geometric spaces with photo realist details resolved within simple dark and light grays and a nice mustardy yellow. Luxmi Thangchalok's "Skylight" also is quite spatial in effect. Spatial relationships are quite subtle in the works of both artists.



"Celaje" by Myrna Baez



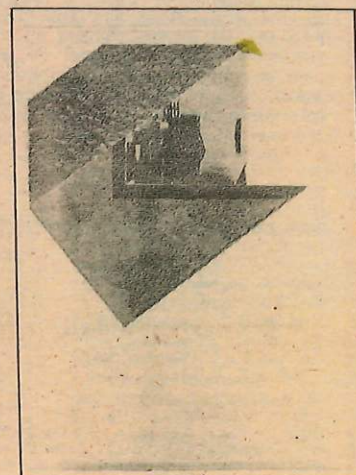
(detail) "Eternal City" by Claire Romano



"Skylight" by Luxmi Thangchalok



"Dedication for Mannis Pinkwater" by Cornelia McSheehy



"Night Seascape"
by Ithinol Thangchalok