

June 26, 1977

BATISTA

GALLERIES

Special to the Star
By FELIX BONILLA NORAT

Photographed by
Jose R. Charon

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL

Carnegie Library Ponce de Leon Ave.
Stop 1. Puerta de Tierra. 724-1046 Open
Mon. to Fr. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sat. 9 a.m.
to 5:30 p.m. Current Show: First UNESCO
photo show and art by young people of the
Art Students League.

CASA DEL LIBRO

255 Calle del Cristo 723-0354
Open Mon. to Fri. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat. 2 to 5 p.m.

"Current Show: The Art of the Water-
mark" and "Relatos de un paisaje
asesinado" a book of serigraphs by Wil-
fredo Chiesa with poetry by Tomas
Lopez Ramirez and music by Rafael
Aonito Ledee.

EL TRAPICHE GALLERY

200 Cristo St. San Juan. Open Mon. to Sat. 10
to 12 and 1 to 4. Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Current exhibit: "La postal Artistica en Puerto
Rico."

GALERIA GUARAGUAO

National Art Center. Callejon de la
Capilla. Old San Juan. Current Exhibition
by Rafael Hernandez, Isabel Bernal and An-
tonio Maldonado.

GALERIA MARIA RECHANY

Magdalena 1363 Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon. to
Sat. 725-4828. Paintings, and prints by Puerto
Rican artists. Current show: Paintings by
Michael Angulo

GALERIA PITIRRE

Condado Convention Center. 723-6090 Ext.
1632. Open Tues to Thurs. 11:30 a.m. to 6
p.m.; Fri to Sun. 12 to 8 p.m.
Current Show: Paul Camacho, paintings
and graphics
Callejon de la Capilla. Old San Juan.
Present show: an exhibition of prints by
Dessie Martinez.

LA GALERIA

MANOS
Convention Center, Condado. Contemporary
ceramics by the Caparra Studio.
Current show: "Clay and Something
Else."

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

Instituto de Cultura 253 Cristo St. 723-2320.
Open every day 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oils, prints
and graphics.

Current show: Fernando Coral Duenas:
drawings

MUSEO DE LA FUNDACION

Behind Tapia Theater, Plaza Colon 725-5962.
Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mon. Indian
Artifacts and sculpture. Current show: "In
honor of the Tainos of the Dominican Republic."

MUSEO DEL GRABADO

LATINOAMERICANO
Casa de los Contrafuertes. 101 San Sebastian
St., Plaza San Jose second floor. Open every
day from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Current show:
Peruvian prints from Taller '72.

MUSEO DEL CONVENTO DE SANTO

DOMINGO
Instituto de Cultura. Open every day 8:30 a.m.
to 5 p.m. Corner Cristo and Norzagaray. Plaza
San Jose, 724-0700, 724-0702.

Current show: Sculpture by Tomas Batista

MUSEO HISTORICO

1396 Giorgetti St. Santurce 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Mon to Fri. Collection of art, history culture,
industry, costumes, stamps, coins. Guides avail-
able.

SALON ISABEL II

City Hall Old San Juan. Opening Wednesday
an exhibition of paintings by Wilfred Labiosa.

UPR MUSEUM

764-0000 Ext. 2452 or 2456. Open daily from 9
a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays; 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Saturdays and Sundays. 10 to 5
Current Show: Photographs by Jesus E.
Marrero

Peace, it's wonderful.

That's both the trouble and the
beauty of Tomas Batista's sculpture
at the Institute of Puerto Rican
Culture's Dominican Convent. More
than 50 sculptures, 8 drawings and
many medals are on display. Batista
is always working; never has time to
play, and the volume of work is here
to speak for him.

In the last year and a half San
Juan has seen more reasonably
good sculpture exhibits including the
last annual show by the Plastic Arts
School students, than in almost the
whole decade before. It is as if in
austerity years our island needs the
invested solidity and hard work of
sculpture more than the vanity and
swifter play of painting. Actually, it's
not that easy to pinpoint. What is
now the finished sculpture probably
started a decade ago, and once
finished, since it is more permanent,
it finds more automatic acceptance
(if only as a real estate value) than
painting does. This group of sculp-
tures by Batista represents a tremen-
dous investment of time and
dreams, plus money too. Don't miss
it now.

Batista always avoided color as a
personality. His bright eyes do take
things in—and then they go back to
his constant modeling, chiseling or
hammering. He may change in style,
he tells me (when 41, it's the thing),
but, are his sculptures ever clamor-
ing? They are not. The quiet peace
in them is the wonder about them.
In the convent, they are nicely
placed amid the potted plants hauled
inside the exhibition structure for
their soothing effect; silent plants,
silent sculptures.

View them as inside your garden
of peace. They won't talk back to
you as some sculptures do. They
refuse to become a conversation
piece either because or innovative
form or their technique, both of
which are par for Batista's course.
They say: "Such things are not solem-
n enough, but dignity is." So they
keep their place as the jibaro does,
in the countryside, where his "muc-
aro" (owl) calls. Both are subjects
Batista loves, as seen many times in
this show. Why so? He is a wise old
owl himself.

"I come from the countryside of
Luquillo" he tells me, "I was really
Jibaro born. I played very little in my
youth, had to work or study every
hour from morn to night, and had
very few friends. But I never felt
alone for I always sought the com-
pany of the oldsters and felt as one
with them, during work and after
work. Under them I learned my
ways. It's something I don't want to
change, something I wanted to ex-
press in my "Jibaro" monument near
Cayey."

I too have a similar lay to sing
about the peacefull jibaros of
Aibonito and Cayey, wise-eyed and
inscrutable as the "mucaros" as
they surveyed the world at the end
of the day. My eyes too would grow
big as the mucaro's as I took in the
Jibaros' wisdom both while they

were silent or talking, drinking or
not, sad or gay. Talk wasn't neces-
sary for talking, since silence can
talk beautifully when souls are at
peace, a nightingale sings or the owl
begins his day. The world is far
away then. Yes, I can understand
Batista' say in the way his sculp-
tures look. No wonder Batista's
monument to the "Jibaro" was cho-
sen to stand near Cayey. He had
been designing it since childhood
and now it stands there, complete
and in peace.

Damn it. The lamb on our seal sits
in peace; our jibaro is at peace. Ac-
culturating archetypes.

"I know what you mean," Batista
says, "but I did it the way it felt
right. In all matters of the heart, I
design what feels right because it is
bound to be more truthful and beau-
tiful. Besides, the stoic heart can out-
last all the miseries."

Thus is explained the quiet sad-
ness in all of stoic Batista's sculp-
tures and the aloofness too, borne
with dignity in the sadness. The
aloofness is sensed in the way the
eyes in his sculptures seem to look
far away, above and beyond the
spectator's head olympian in a hum-
ble way. Very different are sculptor
Lopez del Campo's figures which
seem to look mostly at the ground
between themselves and the spec-
tator, ready to do battle, even im-
patient to do so.

There's a smallness in Batista's
figures even when they are large
sized which can be seen when you
compare the small busts of Hostos
and Betances in the show to their
nearby bigger counterparts. Some-
thing has been lost in the blowing-up
process, especially in the transla-
tions to stone. But the smallness
here is quite robust and is also
borne with dignity, as if it were
Puerto Rico's destiny borne with pa-
tient dignity.

I wish there were impatient ges-
tures in Batista's figures and a
stronger sense of willfully imposed
design such as Lopez del Campo
seeks. But that would not be
Batista's truthful manner of speech
since he seems to think only of what
is and of what was in our history,
and no future revolution seems to be
foreseen by his sculpted people.
They are very sure of themselves in
their stoic dignity, "sure to outlast
all the miseries." Can many coun-
tries boast the same, be as sure of
themselves and their permanency as
a people?

We have been well-served by our
various sculptors as seen this year.
Lopez del Campo is ready for literal
battle now and here; Buscaglia pre-
pares for it intellectually, conscious
of our arrears; Batista assures us
we will always be here, and Lopez
Dirube is ready with his boats and
radar ears. Besides Compostela's
"Penguins" which leer at irresolute
souls, what else is needed?

The above are patriarchal machos.
Carmen Alvarez de Feldman, Elvira
Coya and Luisa Geigel are needed
to catch what the maternal soul can
hear in psychological intelligence
with our ethos and our pathos. Many
younger sculptors bring up the rear.

What do we have to fear? Let's see
if we can start our revolution!

Ah! "Nina con Gato." What a
beautiful sculpture by Batista. Softly
modeled forms, girl and cat as one,
no intruding linear details as in too
many sculptures here, it Reminds me
of Maillol's magnificent work. But
there's a veil over the whole as of a
plastic hood or placenta. Ah, "Nina
con Gato." Why the protective veil?
It protects you, but it also ties the
cat to you in eternity's embrace. So
you will remain ever at peace, I fear.

Ah. You three "Mucaros." You, the
one sculpted in mahogany, with
every feather sharply defined, you
will never fly, I fear. And you in
bronze, you are too heavy, your
eyes too flat and merely decorative;
where are your ears? But you, sculp-
ted in fiberglass of all things, you
seem very wise and alive with your
sly quizzical look.

Oh, you many "Pez" and "Peces"
in this hall, carved in fossil stones,
and you two in alabaster. Your round
fish shapes have pleased your mas-
ter, he says, as he released you
from the other fish and mollusks in
the stones, how would you...?
"Whoosh!, Whoosh!." They are gone,
I am afraid. They were too decora-
tive anyway.

Ah, you "Cat" jumping over a
fence, though heavily carved in your
mahogany. You are the only really
playful figure in this exhibit, come
with me! "Zip, zip!" he dove for his
mouse; refuses to be my mouse, I
am afraid.

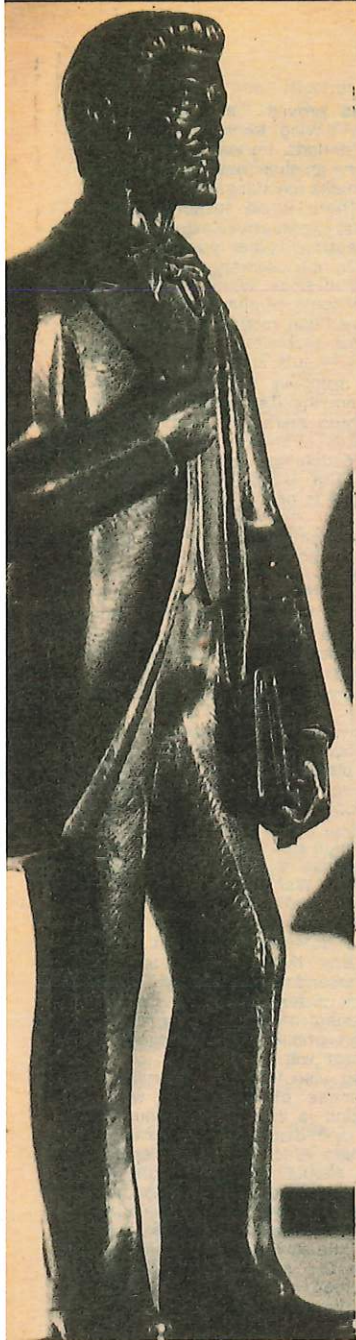
But you, "Gato" in alabaster, so
economically carved in simple vol-
umes, though your finish is too
grainy and some of your curves too
lazy, you look bigger than you are,
quite monumental in fact, unlike so
many pieces, your companions. Quiet
as a mountain, your intent wide
open eyes stare at the moon. Yes,
yes, monuments have to stare the
moon down or they are struck from
their pedestals. I don't blame you.
Goodby.

I can't go (you know why) to the
simple and beautifully rounded
"Paloma" carved in alabaster, her
head and beak resting in peace. So
I go to the very patrician "Hostos"
sketch in bronze, slim-shoed here
when all the other figures in this
show have wide Taino feet or milit-
ary round shoes. But Hostos is too
deep in thought and I dare not inter-
rupt. I disregard the large translation
of Hostos into stone because it is
heavy and indolent, and go to the
"Gautier Benitez" elegantly-stanced
bronze sketch for a monument. But
he too is concentrating on a poem
for a recital at the Ateneo.

So I go home without starting my
revolution, since Batista's figures tell
me revolutions are won only by
those who are sure to stay alive
"after the miseries," and as a peo-
ple they have been selected to stay
alive on this island in the Caribbean,
way into eternity plus an extra year.
So what can I do?

I go home in peace, for I know I
too will be here into eternity. Minus
a few years, of course, since I
smoke too much.

Peace, it's wonderful.



"Gautier Benitez" (bronze)



"Mucaro" (fiberglass)



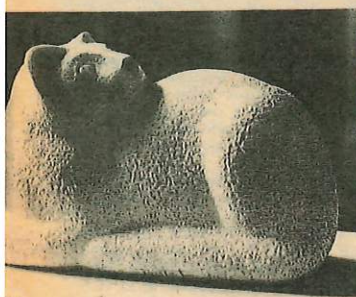
"Gato" (caoba)



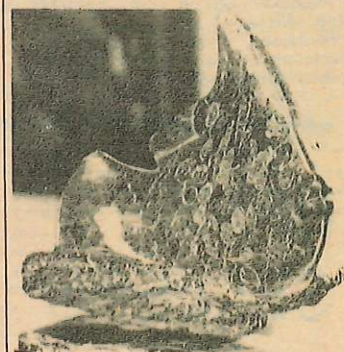
"De "Hostos" (bronze)



"Nina con gato" (bronze)



"Gato" (alabaster)



"Pez" (fossil stone)