

July 24, 1977

ART

Sunday San Juan Star Magazine • July 24, 1977

Youth Blues

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Special to the STAR

On this 25th birthday of Puerto Rico's young Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) how do the youngsters paint or sing? A youngster in art is anybody from 12 to 30, let's say, and let the hare (liebre) be a symbol of them as artists and us as country, for play. It is important to play.

The hare in the countryside is normally a free-swinging animal even when it loses a race with a tortoise. The hare loses when rightly or wrongly it chooses to sleep on the way. In art, are our young wide awake in the race? Or have they chosen to sleep away this fine time? If willfully asleep, is their choice of dreams meaningfully recuperative?

Many art shows were put up by our young this month of July, and there are no racers in the lot.

Where did the young racers go? Normally painters take long to mature and few prodigies are known in art history. Goya and Rembrandt were about 50 when they produced their finest works. But the art I see now in Puerto Rico is not young, it is old. We oldsters of the tribe should be proud. Oh my God! I am stunned, they paint so like us! But are they mature?

Our new crop is very sage. Dutiful and studious, they reflect the already somewhat dubious styles of photo-art, pop, op and other academic props as if they had been brought to a halt by our temporary adversary politics and the economical curbs of austerity. Our painters are painting sure things and reaching for security in approved styles. Very few are lustful about life and fewer still are playful. They do not know how to sing so as not to cry and more important, so as not to die as a people.

There is a song by Rafael Aponte Ledee in Wilfredo Chiesa's "Requiem Mass for an Assassinated Landscape, lately at La Casa del Libro and soon to go to the San Pablo Biennial, I understand. It is an interior monastic chant haunted by windows, slightly elitist. Is art the elite brand? Our elites need to chant too, even more than our mass. We need to sing of a child at play or of a child fully dead, God bless him. The chant of "La Guaracha del Macho Camacho" is more what I mean. It is sung during the open day.

Some of our young artists wring their hands in poverty, do little thin pictures because paint is expensive and hope for Washington to perpetuate our ghetto with its donations, which are its artificial fertilizer for all dreams. They could be painting with their bodies or with yellow, red and violet clays, charcoal blacks, powdered cement blues, greens and whites — but no, the imported tubes of color present nicer qualities to the hand.

Thus instead of celebrating ELA day, I worry. If the young paint like their pops, as good consumers of paint, their inner selves may be asleep, not in the race at a moment when mutants are called for an destiny, has to be faced with austerity and maybe no petroleum or smooth acrylic paints.

I know that the youth of the 60's was wilder the whole world over, and that the present youth of the 70's is pragmatic and phlegmatic worldwide. But must our youth be bureaucratic too, just like pop, the "Establishment?"

I'd prefer that our young were rebels to be stoned for infidelity. The faithful young of any tribe should be unfaithful to the calls of passing fashion, should sing only to the heart and the passion which originated the tribe. But what's our passion?

It should be a race to the date with destiny we have in the 21st Century. New forms are needed, beyond the already proven ones already mentioned and the videotapes, movies, teatro mundo and boy-works of art povera.

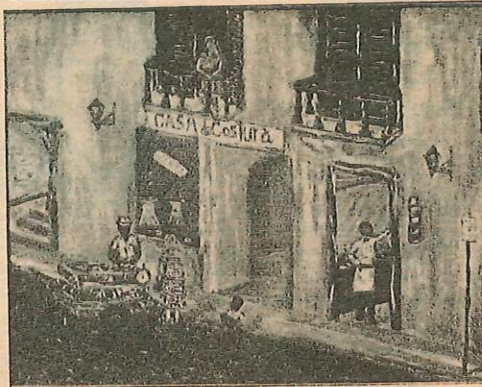
Our consolation may be in the fact that those forms are not yet fully realized in world art, so we still have a chance. Also in the fact that if after 12 years our painters paint "old", that happens to be a world-wide psychological norm. We still have our children under 12. Children from 1 to 12 worldwide are born creators and ours are wonderfully so, as seen in the Art Student League annual student exhibit held at the Carnegie Library in early July, some of which you can still see if you visit the leagues premises near San Jose church.

The only trouble is that in giving prizes most jurors act "old," including myself. I noticed that the three child prizewinners' works at the League were not as epic in scale or handsome in color as other unprized children's pictures in the show, and that Carolee Montanez, 10, (first prizewinner) is already quite sophisticated in composition but not as good in color as 8-year-old Lara Cartagena is in her third-prize work and not as epic in scale and dash as 5-year old Paco Gonzalez is in his 2nd-prize work. The prizewinners in the older-than-12 "youthful-adult" category are predictably anecdotic, dutifully "in perspective," sagely well-finished and aware of current fashions. There is a humble passion, yes, of sorts. But...

Could such a passion be inflamed if jurors acted for the sport. Instead of giving prizes as consumers of common art-and-status brands? If no creative passion is inflamed during the race, do we hang the jurors and electors, or the artists and politicians?

You kids 1 to 12 will decide the race, the art and other events in Puerto Rico, including payment of our multimillion debts. We salute you on this anxious ELA day! Beware of "brand" jurors and professors.

Art student league prize winners

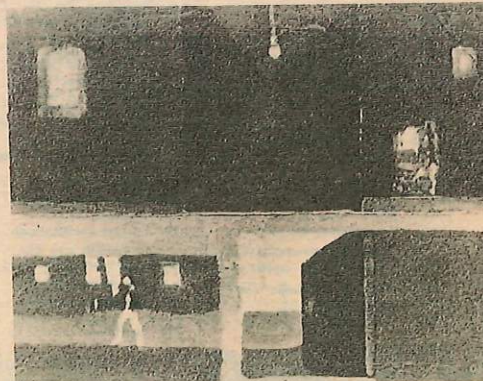


First prize, young people's painting, Jorge Vega, 13

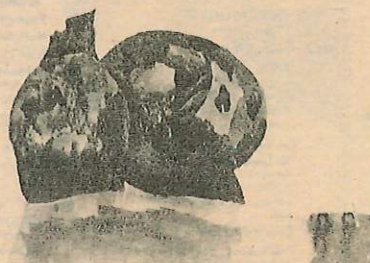


Second prize, young people's painting, Deslee Sarriera, 18

Third prize, young people's painting, Marina Rodriguez, 16



First prize, children's painting, Carolee Montanez, 10



Third prize, children's painting, Lara Cartagena, 8



Second prize, children's painting, Paco Gonzalez, 5