

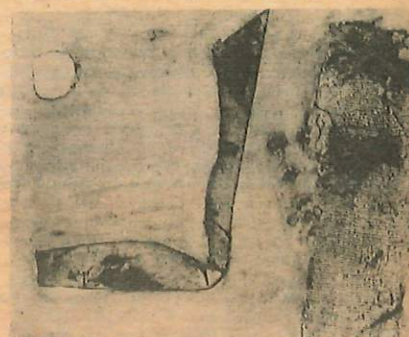
When art is all, is all art?



"Noche" by Maritza Davila



"Danza Erotica" by Rebecca Castrillo.



"Paisaje en movimiento" by Rebecca Castrillo

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Several young artists with University of Puerto Rico backgrounds have recently held exhibitions of their works which are still in some of the galleries including the Coabey Gallery in Old San Juan and the Gem department store gallery in Caparra.

Their work has in common a retracing of art history within themselves as part of the content. Art is a far more extensive field nowadays than in the time of, say, da Vinci or Cezanne. Even Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Mondrian are left behind by today's art povera, art's vanguard wherein the work doesn't go to a museum but can be a sign on the face of the very earth or a concept dramatized by the artist as a living experience, for the eyes of the mind, much as man must have experienced art during Pleistocene times.

Two of the students, Carlos Suenos and Rebecca Castrillo, have tried art povera's manifestations including dance, mime and light displays. Another, Silvia Calzada, is now taking photographs into broken mirrors and Maritza Davila is doing earth-works in paint.

Long before man "created" instructional art in Egyptian times, before he captured the abstract, essential symbols of things in Neolithic times and before he represented such things in the realistic and abstract Paleolithic art, Pleistocene man lived art. He didn't "do" it, he lived it, a most important point. Living art is the shape of the future according to many theoreticians including Karl Marx.

In Paleolithic times, art was any visual way of expressing the life of the tribe as it plodded along. It was any wit, elegance or substantial expression enjoyed thankfully repeated in mime with a laugh or as a

catharsis after a fright. Certainly wit, elegance, expressiveness, catharsis and mime existed long before the words for them were invented, and repetitions of meaningful bits-of-life were with us before rituals and religion were thought of.

Psychiatry and art were practiced by shamans or priests more than a million years ago in the world of the collectors and hunters. Color was used ritually almost a half million years ago. Today Carlos Suenos Ortiz in the titles of his works and in his ritual use of color, harks back to these people. Rebecca Castrillo dances on tribal altars to the life force, most expressionistically. Maritza Davila dutifully polishes the surfaces of the altars and the cave walls, and photographic huntress Silvia Calzada hunts for the expressive moods of the human body inside mysteriously warped and cracked mirrors.

The magic paleolithic presences of art, the neolithic abstract ideographic essences and the instructional aspects of art came later. And much later yet, after Romanticism and Naturalism, came the licences of modern art. Artists are now licenced to do anything they please in the name of art. The young hunters we have been studying are no exception. They have been licentious about quality. They have produced many empty works and other errors of youth.

Now that art is "done" as art and not lived as life, it's a wonder that art hasn't been done in. Worse yet art can today be its own substance; it can feed on itself. It can be all style or abstract form, all container without content, all language with nothing to say.

But the four young hunters know better. Silvia sticks to her search of the nude human body through mirrors, creating charged moods. The other three, abstract in form, seek the rhythms of aliveness and of growth, and the titles of their work suggest the search for ultimate

realities: the birth of myths in Suenos, the dance of life in Rebecca and the search for the quiet "oneness" in Maritza. They are all seeded for future growth.

The education of the masses, a most democratic and irreversible development, has pushed art away from temples, caves, schools and palaces into the universities where life, art and man are studied under all sorts of names. To simplify everybody's entry into art, the universities, following Bauhaus patterns, have had to break the designs of art into their molecular component parts: point, line and plane to construct forms and space; and color, texture elements are supposed to be orchestrated into final art forms under the principles of "unity within variety," proportioned rhythms and economy.

But pictorial or sculptural forms aren't so easy to compose. Thus you see many artists who fail in composition even when they get good plastic qualities. Our young hunters are no exception. All four could do better in composition. They dash into each work pell mell, most expressionistically. A gesture becomes a rhythm of the universe as in abstract expressionism but the density of experienced life is missing. Maybe they are too young, perhaps they haven't suffered or enjoyed life enough. It takes time.

Today we get a lot of interference in our reception of art in the form of art periods and words of art professors and critics, the ideologies of politics and the pulses of the market. So let's ask these young hunters, Children, can we go back to the beginning? Before the licences, the instruction, the essences and the magic presences of art history, can we go back to art as life?

Art ever life-enhancing, ever in the process of becoming, can we get you back? If we can, we shall then be into the future with or without Marx.



by Carlos Suenos Ortiz



by Silvia Calzada



(detail) by Silvia Calzada