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ART

Take sand, cement, crushed stone and marble, pour into a concrete mixer, shake, and out pops

a statue for

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

The "Monument to the Taino Culture" by Luis A. Medina Gaud has at last been finished in Catano's "Youth Plaza," just one block up the shore from the ferry.

Don't miss it. It is significant, first because of the myths already surrounding Catano's "Taino Lady", and secondly because the handsome design by Jaime Suarez of the whole plaza and the monumental sculpture itself by Medina Gaud were produced with homegrown products.

It no longer seems necessary to go to Spain, Italy or the states to produce impressive and permanent monuments for Puerto Rico, such as the 16-foot high concrete sculpture in Catano.

Medina Gaud's work and techniques are well known. Their art is in their economy and simplicity. They will thus set a trend, I am sure. Their time has come; previous efforts were too tentative.

The materials used — sand, cement, and crushed stone and marble — are all very concrete, very discreet yet expressive means for such work, and quite economical. Also the techniques for producing and using such materials and the forms or molds for pouring the concrete in direct from the scoops of the cement-mixing trucks, have been easily grasped for decades by our simplest jibaro builders. Bronze foundry techniques are more complicated and less known, and ceramic kilns to accommodate such large clay pieces are quite expensive, though the techniques for the work are known and practiced on the island.

With concrete, the artists can concentrate on the molds for the actual sculptures and on carefully but assuredly vibrating the concrete mass (with mechanical means if need be) so that it reaches every cranny of the mold so that it leaves no air bubbles before it "sets" in about half an hour. Bubbles produce pits on the surface of the sculpture to which acids in the air can eventually cling.

Acids can erode even cement, just as they are eroding all the beautiful stone and marble outdoor sculptures of the world. Poor Parthenon and Chartres. But cement has an advantage as Medina Gaud knows: its mix can be varied unlike stone and marble which were randomly mixed geological ages ago. I suggest that the laboratories on the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez campus come up with some interesting mixes, including different aggregates, though common sand and crushed stone are the most magnificent. The best mix should seek the greatest density of the material together with the greatest hardness against compressive blows and scratches.

Medina Gaud's "Taino Lady" lost her toes already from somebody's traitorous blow. Maybe the concrete needed to cure a complete year before attaining its maximum strength. Maybe if "water glass" or silicates had been added to the cement, sand and water mix, the concrete could have withstood the blow. Silicates are used by nature to weld stones. Such things Mayaguez could work out for us.

The inside surface of the modelling-plaster molds in contact with the poured, wet concrete mass, have to be hardened for large monumental jobs. They can be scratched by the crushed stones in the mix and by the mechanized vibrators and softened somewhat by the water and the slight heat developed by the setting concrete. Here again Mayaguez with Fomento could help us. Logical things I've tried include adding glues or



GALLERIES

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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.

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.

GALERIA BOTELLO
208 Cristo St. 723-9987. Prints, painting and sculpture, mostly by Puerto Rican artists.

GALERIA COABEY
101 San Sebastian OSJ.

GALERIA CONDADO
Convention Center. Open 11-7 every day. 723-6090 Ex. 1636. Exhibition of work by local artists.

GALERIA DE LA CASA CAMPECHE
200 Calle San Sebastian Open Tues. to Sat. 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. 723-5252.

GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL 900
Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce. 725-2617 open 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday.

MANOS
Convention Center. Condado. Contemporary ceramics by the Caparra Studio. Current show: Miniatures and Small Pieces

GALERIA MARIA RECHANY
Magdalena 1383 Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon. to Sat. 725-4828. Paintings, and prints by Puerto Rican artists.

GALERIA OLLER
Calle Escorial 366, Caparra Hts. 782-3171 Open Tues to Thurs. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Fri 2-9; Sat. 9-2 Paintings and Graphics by Puerto Rican artists.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO
1396 Georgetti, Santurce. Mon.

every park

simple water-proofings and latexes to the wet plaster. But who can guarantee that such stuff will hold fast in a 12-foot high mold filled with an expansive concrete mix, its settling urged by vibrators? Help! Mayaguez!

Medina Gaud solved the production problem by making his monument in four sections. First he made the pedestal in one swoop direct from the cement-mixer's truck. His initial mold, made with wood found in the bay, split open under the pressure. He had to stop and work all night to remove the setting concrete, a thankless but very instructive task.

Next the actual figure was poured into three separate molds and left to set in Catano's gymnasium. The three separate pieces of the figure were then carted to the pedestal and lifted by crane one on top of the other. A central hole with a tube guided the alignments. Inside the tube are documents on our Taino culture and current history. The alignments didn't come out perfectly because the molds opened slightly under the pressure so that some reductions and padding with cement mix were necessary and the union between the three pieces can still be seen, though covered by a slight tar-patina.

Tar can protect cement from strong acids but it travels downward eventually as it did in early 19th Century paintings where it had been used for romantic warm shadings and varnishings. Silicates such as water glass might prove better for impregnating the raw cement surface. Here again, out technological laboratories could cooperate.

How did Catano get its "Taino Lady?" Medina Gaud tells me the small plaza by the sea with its magnificent backdrop of Old San Juan was designed by architect and ceramist Jaime Suarez. The curved lines of semi-glazed red bricks make a free Taino Indian design on the pavement which is made of coarse whitish no-slip terrazo. Low circular concrete planters will eventually encompass shade trees. People will be able to sit on the rims of the planters. The chastely kneeling and nude "Taino Lady" reigns over the plaza, listening to a shell while facing the mountains to which her people scattered on the coming of the Spaniards. Her back is to the bay from which Catano is invaded by tourists of all kinds every day.

"Accion Juvenil of Puerto Rico" pushed the plaza-by-the-sea idea and the National Foundation for the Endowment of the Arts paid Medina Gaud for a "monument to the Taino Culture and to Puerto Rican Womanhood," also described as a "monument to the Caribbean Spirit." In its simple expected volume and chaste pose, in its humbleness and economical monumentality, the work achieves its goal better than many pretentious plazas I have seen in this world. From Catano's mayor on down, people are pleased by the work. I hope other mayors and priests from other towns follow the Catano experience.

Medina Gaud would like to put many similar concrete monuments in Puerto Rico. Notice his previous all-concrete "Virgin," a natural-sized sculpture in the little park in front of Miramar's Perpetuo Socorro Church. It is monolithic. The concrete was poured on the up-turned mold, allowed to set, the mold was discarded, and the sculpture with its base was set on its foundation. Also notice his work in the Anasco plaza and on the second floor of the Condado Convention Center.

Medina also envisages an Experimental School for Sculpture where students would be apprenticed to work



The concrete-mixer method has few, if any, plastic limitations. See closeup of Luis A. Medina Gaud's Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow, left page, and the fluid lines of the sculpture above, and those of his "Taino Lady," above. The limitations are technical — "Taino Lady" has already lost a toe — but could be remedied, with a little help from scientific friends.

on monuments for their towns using simple techniques. He founded an experimental sculpture workshop in Mexico City which is still going on, where polyester and other synthetic resins, various metals and poured concrete are tried for sculptural projects.

Medina is well qualified for his simple "monumental" aspirations. Born in 1941 in Mayaguez, he graduated from the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture Plastics Arts School where he studied under Compostela and Batista, then from Esmeralda Academy in Mexico. He has exhibited in many places. He had won three first prizes in sculpture at the Ateneo on three consecu-

tive years, 1964-65-66, while he was in school here. That's quite an early start.

But sculpture is slow in its majestic grinding away of space and time. Now Medina, like Carlos Raquel Rivera and other artists, is looking for workshop space, a place to work even under the stars, providing a minimum of stability for work. Do you know of any empty buildings or spaces artists could work in? Decrepit old buildings can become productions palaces for art as painter Rafael Rivera Garcia knows from personal experience. Now as head of the Commonwealth Office of Cultural Affairs, can he help?

to Fri. 9 to 4. A summary of history of P.R. in antique objects.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES
Instituto de Cultura 253 Cristo St. 723-2320. Open every day 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oil, prints and graphics.
Current Show: Graphics by Jose Rosa.

MUSEO DE LA FUNDACION
Behind Tapia Theater, Plaza Colon 725-5982. Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mon. Indian Artifacts and sculpture. Current show: (opening Thursday) photographs, "Petroglifos de Boriquen" by Hector Mendez Caratini.

MUSEO DEL GRABADO LATINOAMERICANO
Casa de los Contraluzes, 101 San Sebastian St., Plaza San Jose second floor. Open every day from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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: Puerto Rican paintings.

PONCE MUSEUM OF ART
Las Americas Ave. 842-6215. Open Wed. to Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sun. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mon. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.;

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.