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ART

Professionalism at the Botello Gal

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special To The STAR

The serene existence of the Botello Gallery on the Cristo Street tourist artery has been taken for granted when I wrote about gallery exhibits because, my thinking went, they are "the professionals;" they don't need any help.

But then I began to realize it is time that our art, which has hundreds of producers by now, should begin to pay for its share of the Puerto Rican economy. Art should not be a hothouse flower needing special treatment to flourish, on the contrary art should go into the marketplace even beyond the Caribbean, so Botello Gallery's example merits a good long look.

This time there is a more than usual "collective" exhibit at the Botello Gallery, with some 17 artists represented. I hope this change of pace continues. Normally Botello collectives are swamped by his serene production stream.

Botello established his gallery as a personal show place (several other artists have done the same in Puerto Rico) and he can keep his gallery full as well as his other outlet in the Caribe Hilton Hotel.

Botello has ceded his third outlet in the Cerromar Hotel to ceramist Susana C. Espinosa, another professional who opened her studio here in

1966 after leaving her native Argentina. Some of her sophisticated and witty — if slightly self conscious — ceramic pieces are also on exhibit in Botello's Cristo Street Gallery. Economy of means and wit are here in her application of fine small details on large simple ceramic shapes. This "applique" work at times may go beyond wittiness into cuteness but it is always decorative and restrained.

Restraint and a certain amount of gloss or polish seems to be characteristic of the work presented by the professionals in this exhibit. An artist who wants to compete professionally in the art market does have to use restraint, economy of means and a lot of the even-tempered self-assurance that can come from steadiness in production.

Producers produce money or services which can produce change, so the best way for artists to bring about change is to produce more as individuals. Then their say will count for more.

But the say of artists heretofore in Puerto Rico has been shortened by their dependence on government and other producers. Let's show them!

Angel Botello Barros produces. "He is commercial," "fine" artists criticize. Commerce, they think, is a sin. It means, they believe, cold-bloodedness as opposed to inspiration. It means, they say, selling your soul, producing

what people buy; it means repeating yourself when your product is successful, and producing a product is a negation of art, etc., etc.

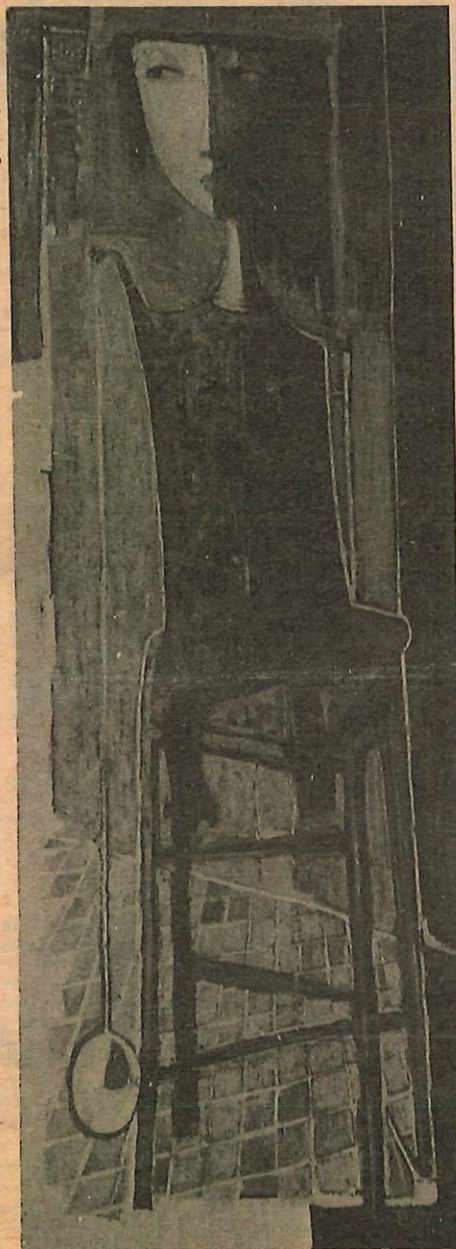
I wonder if such detractors ever paused to think of what civilization is. It is built on commerce and communication. Culture is different. It can be a closed stagnant pool; it can also be as a crossroads such as ours in the Caribbean.

Botello Barros keeps producing while we talk politics. Born in 1913 in Cangas de Morrazo in Galicia, Spain, he has the stick-to-it-iveness of all "Gallegos" as we kiddingly call Galicians in Puerto Rico: they work hard and win the boss' daughter, they can save money since they can lead frugal lives; they don't go out on "viernes sociales." Unthinkable.

Botello hasn't yet paid off the mortgage on his home and gallery on Cristo Street but he will, I am sure, as sure as I am that he will put his children through college.

Botello produces something every day in his studio on Calle Norzagaray, away from the galleries, to feel cushioned from the daily grind. Every day he lunches at 12 and comes home at 6 to his family. Occasionally he takes to his boat for a recess. His dutiful wife Chistiane is Haitian. He employs frame-making helpers in Haiti and here.

The images of children in Botello's



From left: "Nino con yoyo" by Angel Botello, "Dos caballos" by Roberto Moya, "Nino pensando" by Roberto Moya, "Mujer" by Antonio Martorell, "Village" by Eduardo Beale and a figure by Susana Espinosa.



GALLERIES

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL

Carnegie Library Ponce de Leon Ave. Stop 1. Puerta de Tierra. 724-1046. Open Mon. to Fri. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sat. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

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. "The Art of the Calendar"

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 show: Puerto Rican primitive paintings.

GALLERIA BOTELLO

208 Cristo St. 723-9987 Prints, painting and sculpture, mostly by Puerto Rican artists. Current show: Collective exhibition of 17 artists.

GALERIA COABEY

La Casa de las contrafuertes, Calle San Sebastian. Current Exhibition: "Paisajes" by Anallida Burgos, Lyzette Rosado and Jose R. Alicea

GALERIA CONDADO

Convention Center. Open 11-7 every day. 723-6090 Ext. 1632 Exhibition of work by local artists "Voy pa' viejo," paintings by Domingo Garcia

GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL. 900

Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce. Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce. 725-2617 open 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. Opening Friday: "Volando," an exhibit of photos by Marco Kalisch

GALERIA LA CALETA

70 Caleta de San Juan, Old San Juan. 723-8627. Paintings and prints by proprietor Luis Cajigas, ceramics, graphics and sculpture.

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.

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.

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paintings and sculpture were initially "Haitian" in derivation. By now they are universal children and they repeat themselves in his paintings and sculptures as if they were symbols, just as Mondrian repeated his simple rectangular shapes as unconscious symbols of his Calvinistic and puritanical cosmo-vision and personality. Botello's symbolic children can be coy and winsome but they do express something of his self too, of which something he prefers not to speak. But this something is what draws satisfaction from buyers: "I simply like them," they say.

The repeated child shapes are always painted with a first rate command of composition, color of texture. This is not surprising. When I returned to Puerto Rico in 1949 I saw a Botello nude which bespoke of this professional first-rateness, and a colorful Botello landscape which was better than many by Gauguin. I was happy because with him in Puerto Rico we Puerto Ricans could feel competitive and might grow. But then he went Haitian and schematic with his child symbols, his excuses to paint.

Years later I told him he was repeating himself, why didn't he look around his metropolitan habitat which was becoming grey and industrialized? As if on a dare, a year later he had produced a series of Catano

industrial scenes with great professional flair. Thus, he can do anything he chooses. For now, he limits himself and keeps choosing his child symbols. And they keep selling. It is typical that the work I chose for illustration of this article — because it is vetical, unusual in his work and for its interesting floor tile design climbing up a wall in a break with perspective, is already sold, but two similar ones have taken its place.

This "not quite alike" repetition of successful work, which the Haitian primitives have also, is a professional trait too as witnessed by the countless Renoir nudes, Cezanne Mont St. Victoires, Mondrian rectangles and even Leonardo "La Gioconda smile." Many of our Puerto Rican artists repeat their favorite themes in the same way, each alike yet not quite exactly like the others. They are variations on a theme. But Botello exhibits them together in Puerto Rico, and is accused of repetition and of limitation.

Picasso, who used to do countless variations on every theme he tackled, told me once in passing that the secret was not to exhibit them all at once. I imagine that's why he kept buying castles, to hide variations. Now after his death they are in the market and seem like new.

Most of the work in this show is repetitive too. So was Egyptian art once sold throughout the Mediterra-

nean or Cretan female goddesses or Murillo's madonnas or Puerto Rican santos. The market calls for them.

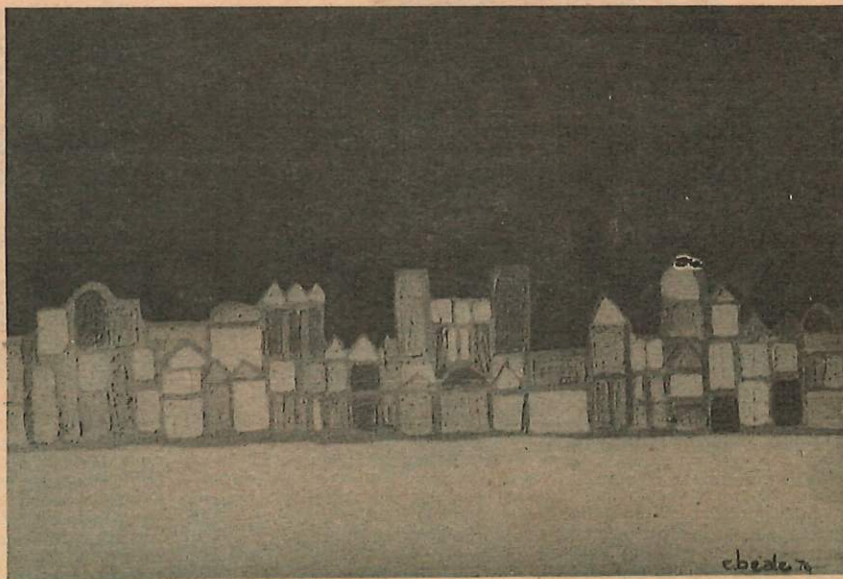
In this show, witness Henry Moore's nice litho of upright women, one of a long series; Zuniga's known charcoal drawing; Jose Luis Cuevas' tired known ink drawing; Friedlander's painterly intaglio; Emilio Sanche's light-enhanced wood houses; Julio Santiago's Taino design graphics; Maritza Davila's cellular search for oneness in her seven intaglios; some of Luis Hernandez Cruz' colorful "neolithic" serigraphs; Antonio Martorell's prints of humble bed-posts and other daily objects which present renovated visions of twice-seen realities; Marcos Irizarry's haunted pursuit of geometry on to its biological hunger. All of them are variations on a theme.

Eduardo J. Beale's series of "Casas" can be considered repetitive as to subject matter, austere color and technique, but the spatial divisions try to offset the effect as do the vigorous impastoed areas. However, his "Mujer Rusa camino a Siberia" is definitely one of a kind, done with a monumental vigor which could be useful for murals. A young 24-year-old architect originally from Cuba, who studied in the states where he maintains his Bergdorf Goodman Gallery exhibiting connections, Beale is also branching off to

sell in Spain, Venezuela and Mexico.

Roberto Moya's figurations are all different because he starts each composition from life, seemingly not in the studio as too many professionals do. But his very special and strong spatula-swath technique and his use of acrylic modular colors makes them appear of one family. The dashing style dresses the content. Born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, Moya studied in New Mexico and at New York's Pratt and New School for Social Research where he used to do very realistic faces of Bowery types. Then he went into abstract oils with thickly spatulaed unctuous cellular divisions; then came back to Puerto Rico in 1968 where he opted for his present spatulaed technique but with realistic and tropically colorful subject matter. How he uses purple reds or magenta for the shadows, and the value five thalo greens for the glancing lights would scandalize the Fauves. It's a limit for color! His secret is to leave plain white areas around the very simplified figures. Lately his shadows have started to become darker in value.

Yep. Let's hold unto our egos, colleagues of mine Let's be like the dinosaurs, they didn't believe in commerce. It's a dirty world, they said, as they munched the vanishing supply of herbs. Puerto Rico and art demands — do you supply?



Galería W. Labiosa
415 Sol St., San Juan.
Mon-Fri. 1:30- 5:30. Graphics 9-5.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO
1396 Goergetti, Santurce, Mon. to Fri. 9 to 4. A summary of history of P.R. in antique objects.

LA GALERIA
319 Fortaleza St., San Juan Currently: Small works by Puerto Rican artists for Christmas presents.

MANOS
Convention Center, Condado. Contemporary ceramics by the Caparra Studio.

MUSEO DE LA ESCUELA DE ARTES PLASTICAS
El Morro Grounds. Mon. to Fri. 8 to 5. Sat. 2 to 5. Exhibit by Silk Screen Workshop students.

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.

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.

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: Posthumous exhibition of works 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. by Ismael D'Alzina.

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. Saturday and Sundays, 10 to 5. Current show: Forta Unesco Painting Salon