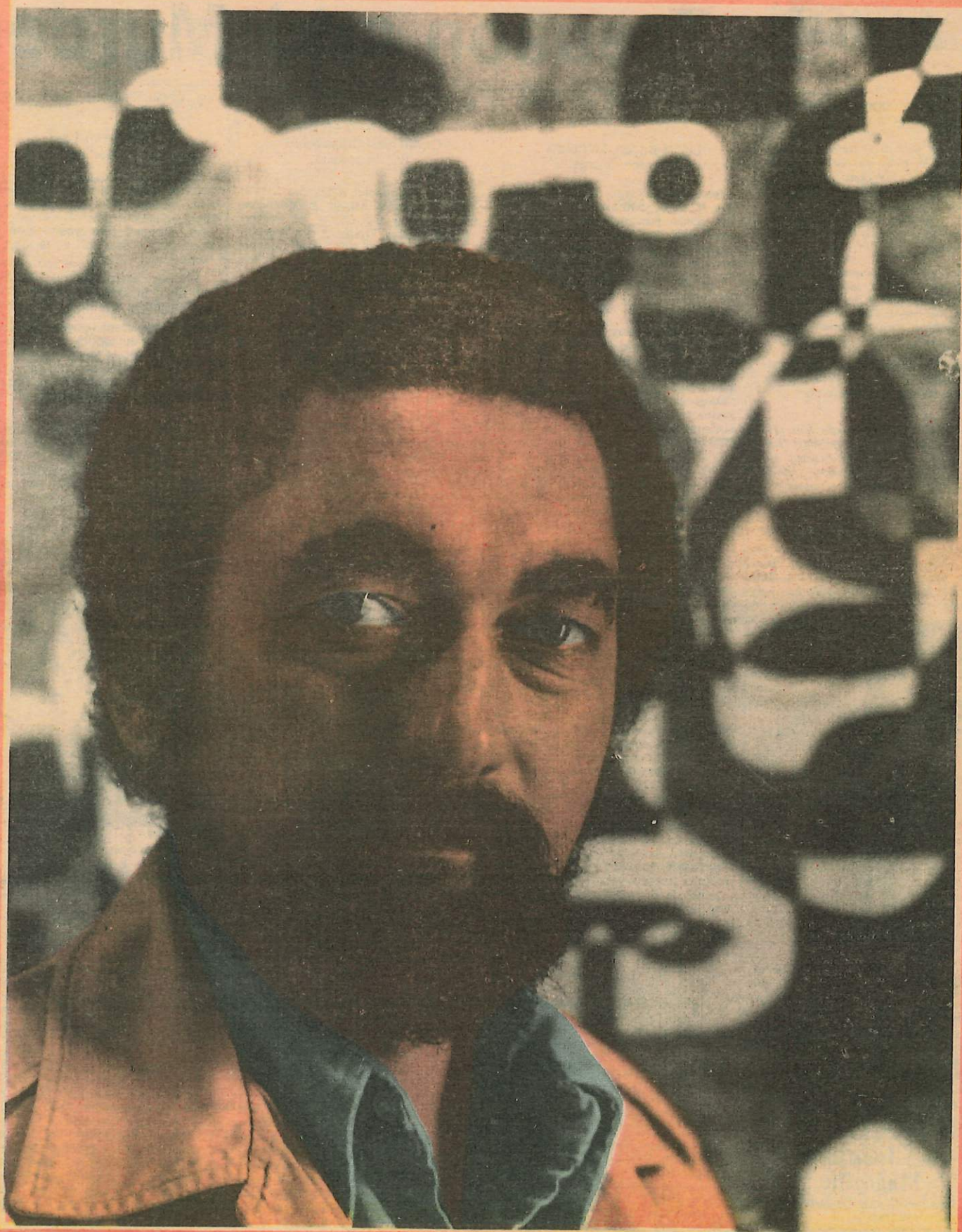
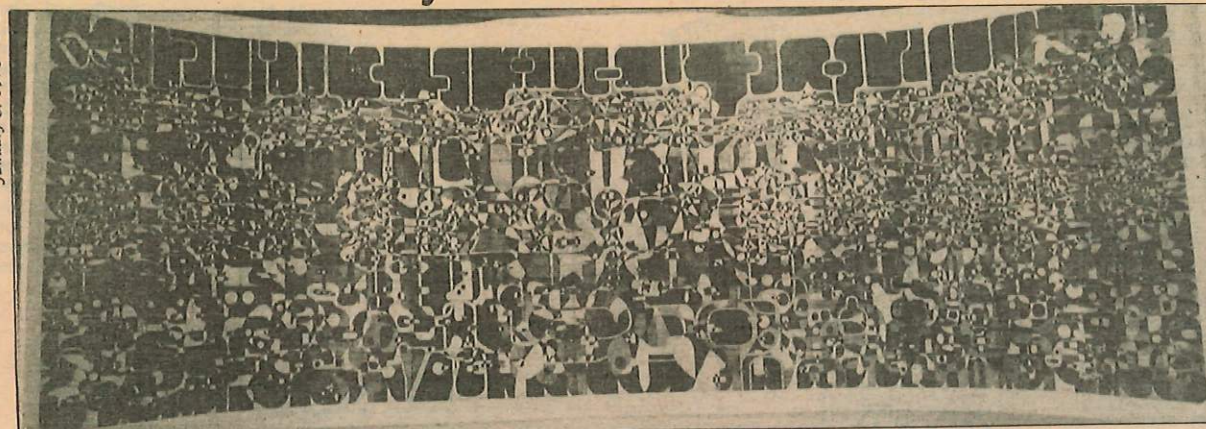




Marcos Irizarry 10 years later.

See Page 10.

Marcos Irizarry come home!



Untitled graphic mural, done "about 1975" by Marcos Irizarry. The curved form is not deliberate — but done to fit the mural into the Museo del Grabado. (STAR Photo)

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special To The STAR

One of Puerto Rico's real professionals in the graphic arts, Marcos Irizarry, is giving an excellent visual account of his last 10 years work at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's "Museo del Grabado" on the Plaza San Jose. The exhibition closes tomorrow.

During his 10-year absence from Puerto Rico, Irizarry apparently opted for geometry — although it is a geometry with biological pulses as can be seen in his latest and the largest mural engraving in the show. In it the forms are decidedly geometric but they interpenetrate each other almost as if in coitus.

There are similar interpenetrating rounded forms in quite a few famous paintings of the past, including "The Blue Woman" series by Fernand Leger (1912), the "Dances in the Fountain" series by Francis Picabia (1912), the "Bailarinas" series by Gino Severini (1912) and "The Adventure of a Young Girl" series by Paul Klee (1922). The titles suggest erotic meanings for the forms in Irizarry's latest graphics. We have to guess at the meanings since Irizarry refuses to title or date his work. The forms can imply erotic energies, the curved feminine principle in art.

Irizarry says he cut short the flow of such curved works and is now doing colorful acrylic paintings of more simple geometric shapes. These more recent works — not on exhibit — have collaged and built-up sections and textures, sometimes running down from the wall onto the floor. Sounds interpenetrating too, doesn't it? Why didn't he bring any of these paintings here? "They are too heavy to travel," he said.

Irizarry who is 41 and lives in Ibiza, says that he is at loose ends and speculating on future directions. Couldn't his direction take him here? Puerto Rico needs its true professionals to export art for Puerto Rico's own present rite of passage. We need art bridgeheads abroad, as Haiti has.

Irizarry has been consistent in quality since he started in the early 1960's, and most consistent since he opted for geometry in the forms exhibited here. His forms and technique

have varied little but there has been a gradual *pasado-fino*—smooth development in the scale relationships and in the rounding-off of the corners in his rectangles. These formal relationships range from the initial large-scale shapes in his closed compositions to smaller similar but interpenetrating shapes within such open compositions as his large mural. Within their reduced scale the latter shapes proliferate in the open compositions almost like pulsing biological cells filling up the cosmos—but not completely.

It is the "not quite" syncopations and even cut-off rhythms in Irizarry's and other Puerto Rican art which interest me. They may put us into art history.

In Irizarry's case he allowed the almost cellular proliferation of forms in his works — then he cut his production off. It is as if the artist had cut-off a growth just in time.

Did he stop because he does not care for, or is afraid of, biology in his art? Our art goes into geometry and biology both at once but never completely into either so that we have no out-and-out wild expressionists. Our expressionists are too formally conscious. As for our geometricists in art, they put titles on their works even if in jest sometimes. Baptisms are really a recognition of biology's products. As a people in art and life we find refuge in the "not quite" shelter. Is Irizarry the person sheltered too? Sheltered from life?

Irizarry's shelter is in Spain, where he has a house and a workshop in the mountains of Ibiza, an island off the Barcelona and Malaga coasts. In his workshop he has his printing press which is also geometrical in shape and spirit, tying him perhaps to Ibiza. But the press could move. He says it might. Who knows? He might set up another printing press here and come back often. That would be ideal but who can tell?

Every affirmation Irizarry makes, he ends with, "What do I know?" Is he Spanish or Puerto Rican? He is both, and none. Are roots necessary for creation? Definitely so, for some people. It depends on their psychic make-up and vital needs. Anything will do if it will help art.

Irizarry's mother lives in Mayaguez

where he was born and he seems to feel impelled to report to Puerto Rico on the progress of his work as he is doing now after 10 years, during which time his mother occasionally visited him in Spain. Otherwise he was alone with his work.

Why did he decide on Ibiza?

"It's very quiet in the mountain there," says Irizarry. "In my apartment in Madrid, as also in Puerto Rico, time goes by in talking and visiting. In the mountains, time expands and I can concentrate."

"My work is sent here, and to New York, Madrid, Paris, London, and other places to be sold. Other Puerto Rican artists export their work — Luis Hernandez Cruz, Lorenzo Homar and others including Antonio Martorell. Many more artists could export their work from Puerto Rico if they wanted. Maybe the government should help. Maybe the biennial should be reestablished and foreign gallery owners should be invited to get to know Puerto Rican artists. Some promotion is necessary, maybe, what do I know? It's always slow going. Nobody gets rich; the works are left on consignment, here as everywhere. So it is risky too, who can tell?"

Marcos Irizarry is as assertive when he talks as when he engraves, which he does directly on zinc plates. But he hedges his words and maybe his thoughts diplomatically here in Puerto Rico, maybe to avoid unnecessary and unwanted commitments. He certainly does not disperse himself but apparently reserves his aggressiveness for his work. He seems to limit his words as he limits the shapes in his works in this show: simple flat-black geometric shapes against white paper with a few in-between grays for adornment or transition, an austere tonal scale with an almost total absence of color.

His compositions have opened up in the last few years with their almost cellular proliferation. The largest mural engraving in this exhibit is a piece consisting of 14 pieces or, as he has said, "an engraving giving birth to engravings, 14 of them."

"I never use titles in my works since all I do is speculate with forms," Irizarry says, "I never sign my

works on the metal plate itself, I don't know why. Yes, Rembrandt and Goya did sign, who knows why?" Frank Stella, the geometric minimalist, would approve of such enunciations. Geometry hates signatures, they are too personalized.

Irizarry never dates his works in or out of the plates, although he does sign them in pencil outside the plates. No signature and no date imply a submersion of the artist and his time in the work: a sacrificial gesture. Why? Is it because it is a fashion of geometric art?

There is law and order in Irizarry's work now, such as Apollo would approve in Olympus. But there is a tension too, not quite Dionysiac or expressionistic, not quite an angst as there was in his initial *goyesques* of the early 60's with their elongated witches and black-mass somberness.

He was poorer then, unknown as yet, and finishing his San Fernando Academy training in Madrid with Panama's Julio Augusto Zachrisson, Spain's Gerardo Aparicio and Antonio Marcoida and Puerto Rico's Natividad Gutierrez. All of them experimented and all used the academy facilities. With aplomb, the members of this peer "family" workshop group called themselves "autodidactas," or self-taught. It is a way of denying the establishment. And they rose in prestige. They were the nucleus of the "extended family" peer group that enlivened Spanish graphic arts in the early sixties, and which was acclaimed by Spain and other countries. They could have gone on winning acceptance and sales until kingdom come with their black *Goyesques*.

But Irizarry went into geometry. First it showed in willful white spaces which imposed themselves on the *Goyesques*, killing them as such. We have seen several such prints in Puerto Rican shows since Irizarry's 1966 exhibit at the Colibri Gallery. Irizarry's imposed white spaces had rows of round reliefs for abstract adornment initially as if to shock Goya.

Then the geometry grabbed him. Geometry is man's will to possess nature; geometry is also shelter and anchor from feminine nature's catastrophes.