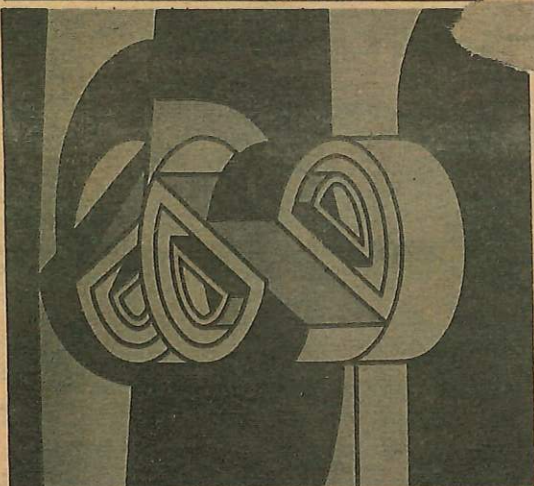


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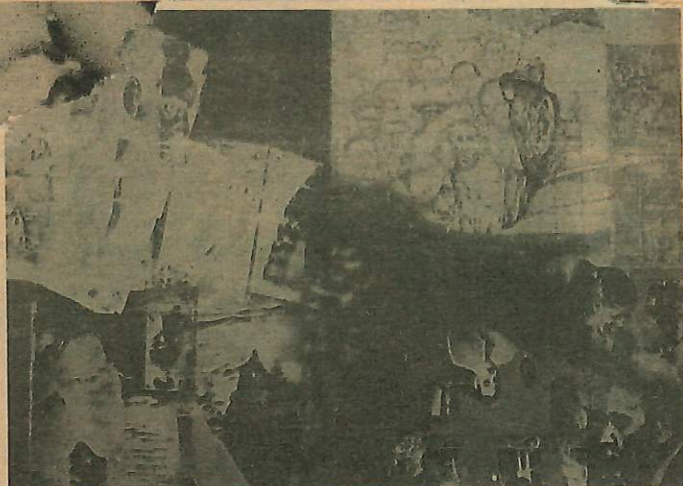
'Muestra' is pretty sordid pretty picture



"Reverberacion" by Paul Camacho



"Quartet- Dendroid Series"
by Bob Nash



"Sin título" by Carlos Irizarry

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

A representative exhibition of Puerto Rican painting and sculpture, the second "Muestra Nacional," is now at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture headquarters, the Dominican Convent in Old San Juan. It provides a good occasion for taking stock of our current art status.

I asked many artists and other people, including an institute janitor, to compare this second "Muestra" with the first. The consensus is that last year's was brighter perhaps because more artists were represented with shinier works. The jury this year—collector Carlos Conde IV, artist Julio Rosado and collector and artist Fernando Monserrate—rejected a good number of submitted works in an aristocratic move for quality.

The exhibition this year was also limited to art produced this year, while, for the first "Muestra" a more extended time span was allowed and the pickings therefore were richer.

This year and last year both showed us that art in Puerto Rico is a very serious matter of specialized object making. Why?

It is OK to do art objects for galleries, museums and homes. Art has been defined as emotion objectified. But what if the object shows no other emotion than the artist's desire to create something, as if it were a duty? There is little playfulness in these works on exhibit perhaps be-

cause of lack of daring. There isn't an expressionist in the lot, perhaps because of our chaste taboos, instead there are many number of good constructors here who construct piece by piece by slow addition. There are no really bad pictures or sculptures because the jurors were efficient censors and the whole experience is one of tidy efficiency, a tribute to our respectable society as a whole.

There are some serenely finished works but even they speak of patience and care with never a hint of wantonness. Wantonness in Puerto Rico art is apparently taboo because it is too undisciplined, merry and gay and too licentious. It can also be arrogant, malicious or reckless with the spectator—and even unjust. Wantonness is luxuriant in its growth, overly lavish in its speech and imagination and spiteful with its opposition. Wanton is what our politics are but not our art.

I was surprised at the way Carlos Irizarry was chastized by our artists and politicians when he wantonly said he would kill President Ford. Such a playful Dada outburst was received as the socialist Dada artists themselves were received in the beginning of the century—with opprobrium.

Why is our art so serious and timid when most of our people and our politicians are not? We have to break out of this limitation and understand the generality that art can be, if it is playful enough and wanton enough. It is up to our artists.

Let's see those "serenely finished" works. By serenely finished I mean they may lack some passionate or playfull wantonness but they manage to convey the serenely assured technical finish of a fine object, along with a discreet or controlled emotional content.

Myrna Baez is virtuously steady in production and never fails to interest us with her work. A certain loneliness and dreamy nostalgia in her own makeup seems to charge her work with anxious silences between the painted people and the people and daily objects of their world. The anxiety is not an epic romantic "angst" of lavish speech, it is rather an harassment born in stoic silence, as by the two featureless girls in "El Sofa." Since they have no mouths or eyes they depend on body language to tell us they are listlessly yet tensely aware of themselves, of the banal lamp and of us as spectators. Their world is a decorative scenography including early Renaissance linear trees out of character with their more Baroque painterly vague bodies. This adds to the anxiety. Notice that Myrna Baez follows codes of yesterday into a dreamy today which can not face today's pressures. That too speaks of our Puerto Rican anxieties. Miss Baez's psychology is a part of Puerto Rico.

Lopez Max Diaz is more physical and less psychological in his approach. After all he started to study

architecture and is still the constructor of the space between his planar shapes and sometimes between those shapes and the spectator. This sounds as if he were following a more modern painting code. But his present works such as "Penetracion" go back to codes of the beginning third of this century, including Malevich's Suprematism as further developed by Mondrian and by Minimalism. Lopez Max conveniently and significantly eliminates the animal and dramatizes the geometric traps or shelters. In "Penetracion" he adds a futuristic touch with the small green square causing accordion pleats as it penetrates the large red square. In "Metamorfosis" the squares turn around. The simplicity and clarity of the ideas make up for the multiplicity of codes behind these pictures.

Paul Camacho's two works admittedly follow Cubistic codes. He too eliminates the animal and like Lopez Max he dramatizes a search for the codes of geometry, security and regularity to master the world. But the world keeps moving in flux, thus such titles as the present "Reflejo" and "Reverberacion". Geometry is being chopped up. The interesting thing is that the once all too dominant ovals or drums which used to fill up his pictures almost completely are now smaller in proportion and stand out as figures against emerging backgrounds. The latter is a new sign for him with a new sense of scale. Maybe he is moving toward totemic figuration. Man or his gods must out.

GALLERIES

ARCHIVO GENERAL

500 Ponce de Leon Ave. (Old Bacardi Bldg.)
Exhibit of "Six Spanish Painters of Today."

ART STUDENTS LEAGUE

Rodriguez Army Hospital Building, Old San Juan. Current exhibition: Paintings by Shine, Lopez, Ortiz and Suarez.

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL

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

CASA DEL LIBRO

255 Calle del Cristo 724-0354. Open Mon. to Fri., 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 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.

GALERIA BOTELLO

208 Cristo St., Old San Juan. Tel. 723-2879. Paintings and prints by local and international artists.

GALERIA COABEY

101 San Sebastian St., Old San Juan 723-1018. Current show: Silkscreen prints and posters by Jose Alicea.

GALERIA DE PALMAS DEL MAR

Palmas del Mar, Humacao. Mon-Sat. 10-1 and 2-6; Sunday 2-6. 852-3450 Ext.2507. Works by Puerto Rican artists.

GALERIA ELUSTONDO

Cristo 200. Old San Juan. Mon. to Sat., 10-6. Paintings, drawings and woodcuts by Suenos, De la Maza, Merkel, Lucas and Elustondo.

GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL 900

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

GALERIA GUATIBIRI

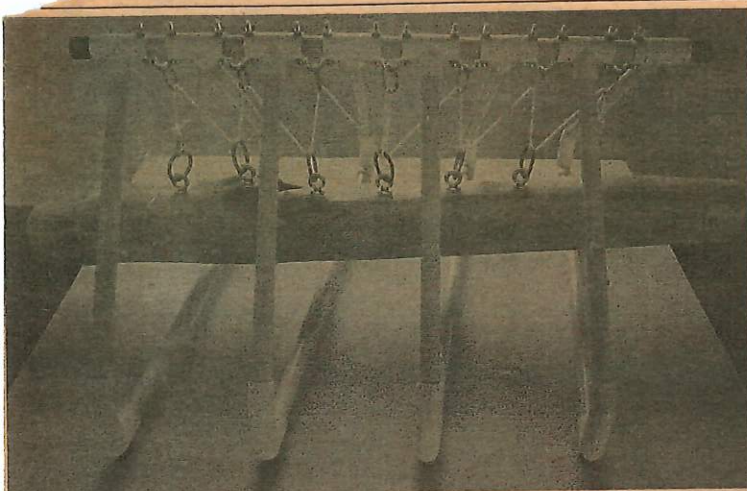
1003 Gonzalez Ave., Rio Piedras.

GALERIA LA CALETA

70 Caleta de San Juan. Old San Juan. 723-8627. M-Thurs. 10-6; Fri 10-3, sat closed Sun. 1-6. Paintings and prints by proprietor Luis Cajigas, ceramics, graphics and sculpture.

GALERIA MUNICIPIO

City Hall, Old San Juan. Current show: Prints and posters by Luis G. Cajigas.



"Documento II: 26 degrees N/70 degrees O" by Antonio Navia



"Sofa" by Myrna Baez

Neolithic and Cubistic codes are also reflected in the works of Luis Hernandez Cruz. He too eliminates man. He always composes with a figure and ground code. His figures represent man's world or man's objects such as the altars, temples and cryptographic signs in the present work. There is always the "finca" or world to hang onto, never man himself, never the id or the animal within all of us, ever a sign of wantonness.

Carlos Irizarry is more wanton. He prefers the Dada codes of freedom. Yet in his painted world he ties himself to man and the reality principle. Witness his "El General"—an existing person who has become almost a folkloric image—and his "Sin Titulo" where a man's effect on his people is explored with a splashy almost abstract expressionist technique. Man dominates over the background, over the world, is his message. Lope Max, Camacho and Hernandez Cruz suggest the image of the world or finca while Myrna Baez' figures are harassed by having to live in this world.

The interesting but minimal 1960's code of Op or optical art is followed by Antonio Lopez in his "Modificaciones cromaticas" and "Transformacion optica de cuatro colores". Lopez is grammatically interested in color as it modifies and transforms itself through visual juxtapositions. Like TV it can be said of these works that the medium is the message. The language of color is its own subject matter. Modern so-called pure art liberated artists to accept

such limits as we accept chess rules. It is good anyway to know we have a painter who is doing something with the world of color. Color's wantonness will shine some day beyond its grammar.

The sculptures in the show are quite tactile, since most are made of clay slabs which easily accept imprinted textures. The most monumental of the group, not necessarily because it also is the largest in size, is the 'Quartet-dendroid series' by Bob Nash. He is a newcomer to our art world who constructed this sculpture by adding four circular pushed and pulled cylinders one on top of the other. The resultant totemic figure as a dendroid is literally and symbolically fragile and somewhat exultant in a nostalgic manner as if the end of gods and even man were near judgment by the dendroid and art works in this show.

Man and his beast and his gods are absent from most of the works in the show. There are rare exceptions: Augusto Marin's "Pareja" and "Banistas" as cavorting energy; Olga Alequin's masterpiece on man as clothes "La era del mahon"; Ramiro Pazminos' men as beheaded sufferers; Jorge Rechan's as degraded Christ; Fran Cervoni's as small accidents in impressionistic landscapes; Richard Pagan's as mere suggestion and Angel Botello's as bibelot children.

All the clay sculptures are fragile—it is what pragmatic sculptors must accept if hard stone, wood or metal are not easily available or are

evaded. John Balossi's "Caballo de fuego" is another monumental totem, one of the few animals in the show. "Con alas" By Susana Espinosa is a prototype of the touchable bird goddess. Jaime Suarez sticks to clay walls and Sylvia Blanco mixes clay with metal. The size of all the sculptures is small: a limitation. Somehow Olga Alequin's "Fuerza bruta", carved in stone, is a better lesson for us; it is monolithic.

The most serenely assured sculptures here are the masterfully carved "Figura" and "Aro", both in hard wood by Rolando Lopez Dirube. It is amazing how he always makes the wood grain flowingly follow his forms. "Figura" is a semi-abstract of a primitive goddess with a fish, an eternal subject. Lopez Dirube's latest sculptures have gone to Venezuela this week for an important one-man show there. A thick, color illustrated book on his life work is soon to appear in Spain and Venezuela. His codes are quite permanent and flow from the artist's direct contact with his materials. John Balossi has similar codes, but then sculpture is ever more direct than painting and less sophisticated. It is forced to be more economical because of the expense and hardness of the materials. Anybody can flow paint on a canvas. Now try flowing marble, wood or metal. Therefore more of us paint. We are pragmatic.

For those who may think I am pushing for a return to realistic figures in art, let me describe Antonio

Navia's very anthropological objects in this show. They follow ancient codes of metaphor as they speak of man and the world. "Documento I: Stonehenge para Millet" is a reasonably solid, therefore semi-Neolithic, construction principally of wood and rope. It suggests a loom, something Millet painted. Initially I read in it a put-down of Millet, last century's French realist. But Navia assures me it is a monument to Millet because Millet did understand such Stonehenge constructions Millet was ever in favor of lowly yet epic people, Rousseau's noble savages. Therefore Navia's subject here is man, subject enough for any art object.

As for "Documento II: 26 degrees N/70 degrees O" that is a boundary of the Bermuda Triangle, a spooky place for man in the sea and the air. The art object consists of many triangles that pull and sustain a floating log, allowing it to pass through the triangles space at the whim of the triangles. A nice visual metaphor about man's destiny and about part of man's "finca" on this earth. Also, such a metaphor is a natural for a Puerto Rican who may see the log of Puerto Rico floating along, manipulated by the codes of status.

Our artists, when I accuse them of following old codes, can defend themselves by saying they are being Puerto Rican with their undecidedness and eclecticism and they favor painting "fincas" or landscapes and places to escape to, instead of painting ugly man himself.

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.

GALERIA RAQUEL

San Jose 257, Old San Juan. Mon. to Sat. 10-6: European oil paintings.

GALERIA SAN SEBASTIAN

104 San Sebastian St. Puerto Rican paintings and sculpture.

INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

Convento de Santo Domingo, Old San Juan. Current show "Muestra Nacional de Pintura"

MANOS

Convention Center, Condado. Contemporary ceramics by the Caparra Studio. T-F 12-3; S&S 12-4.

GALERIA W. LABIOSA

415 Sol St. Old San Juan. 724-6293. Mon.-Fri. 1:30-5:30, Sat. 9-5:30. Puerto Rican art.

INTERAMERICAN UNIVERSITY

San German Beverly Student Center. "Tapices" by Beatriz Sanabria

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 DE LA FORTALEZA

Governor's Mansion, Old San Juan. Open only during business hours. Current show: Paintings and drawings by Janet D. Esopo

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. Current show: posters and drawings by Jose Melendez Contreras.

UPR MUSEUM

Rio Piedras Campus. Open daily 9-9, Sat., Sun. 9-3. Current exhibit: Drawings by Luis Paret y Alcazar

UPR MAYAGUEZ MUSEUM.

Student Center. Current show: paintings & sculpture by Bill Birdsall.