

Nov. 25, 1978

78

PORTFOLIO

Balossi exhibits his 2 loves: painting, sculpturing

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special To The STAR

John Balossi has two loves and he is parading them both at his exhibit at the Art Students League in Old San Juan. If you want to get John Balossi's goat, tell him that his sculpture is better than his paintings—or vice versa.

"I am both a painter and a sculptor", he insists in a recent interview, off ferociously, as he was taught in the Marine Corps. "Want to make something out of a true thing? I was born to be both and I am both because my hands have a way with both arts. My various senses know how and when to impinge on each art, for each art is different but both are plastic, visual and tactile though sculpture does use my kinesthesia and sense of equilibrium more naturally. Three dimensional gobs do fall down like the famous apple, whereas painted apples stay put."

But, Balossi, isn't it complicated and expensive to have two loves?

"You should talk! When are you going to paint instead of writing or constructing? As for me, when I sculpt I am a sculptor, when I paint I am a painter, as simple as that. These works you can call sketches. So maybe they are

not masterpieces. So what? I enjoyed doing them, now I share my joy with the public. It's my (expletive deleted) job."

The show is a handsome one with its simple straightforward paintings and sculptures which complement each other thematically: horses, or "jacas", then women or goddess figures as the good old hunting paleolithic times. As for his "finca", or landscape—world, it exists in the water colors only. The world itself is sculpture's ground; painting always has to present the gestalt, or relationship of the positive figure with the negative space or ground around it. Thus the landscapes appear here naturally as added complements, for Balossi is a natural man.

Painting landscapes or "finca" began during Mesolithic times: man was then coming to grips or cataloging the "outside" world. But "beast" and woman goddess or "hembra" figures were inside jobs to most of us since the beginning of time. Balossi reflects these eternal values as so many archetypes.

In connection with "finca" I find that English is not a sufficient language in some cases. For example, it translates "finca" into farm or country house, which also is true, but



"Night Horse," one of Balossi's sculptures on exhibit at the Art Students League.

not true enough. Finca in Spanish is unmoveable real estate, urban, rural or maritime. It has the same root as "hinca", or thrusting of such as a pole, fulcrum or lance into the ground. Notice that Balossi's landscapes are mostly straight verticals in a horizontal space, as if he were a Spanish solker in horizontal

Flanders: their slogan was to "hinear la pica en Flanders". In this show, Balossi does better than the Spanish soldiers did then. I like his landscapes anyway, though at times the verticals become women too in a very pagan asexual touch. Another root for "finca" is "ahinco", or great desire, zeal or effort. Balossi's "ahinco" is



JOHN BALOSSİ

without question in the works on these walls; he is going to keep at it until the very end. That's the secret of his success so far in life. If his vertical trees become transformed according to his titles into women or if they carry nests or are visited by night winds, it's because forests can have the vapors too. Thus the horse

or "jaca", the goddess or "hembra" and the "finca" are one single transformed thing for Balossi, as for the poet Luis Klorems Torres: they represent life. He works for the living, not the dead: go and get your life injection as you view these works.

It's a very simple thing. The secret in art is to be in love and to play with your love as Balossi does. That's why he uses expletives when he speaks of his "job" — Art is not a job, it's a lark. Who cares about masterpiece larks?

If Balossi's figures of horses and women seem repetitive and if they stress verticalness, simply note that the upright day stresses the horizontal night, as in all natural processes and archetypes. Just about all of art has been produced to sing Balossi's three simple things; the "jaca", or emotional horse or animal within all of us; the "hembra" or mother figure for all earth children, and the "finca" or world to hang onto.

There's nothing else. Are you a romantic, Balossi?

Sure as hell, count me in. I am always going back to human values. That's where everything began. Not that pure art is wrong, but that life is more complete."

The exhibit ends Wednesday.

Artist draws on Bayamon's history for murals

How do you spruce up the flat, grey walls of squat cement look-alike buildings in a drab public housing project? That's simple, most people would say. You paint 'em.

The Bayamon Institute of History and Culture went the obvious answer one better—make that two better—with its decision to not only paint murals on those walls but to have the murals depict some historical highlight of the municipality's rich past.

For this purpose the institute recruited Francisco de Asis Rivera, a young painter who studied art at the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture's Plastic Arts School. The nickname "Frankie" has also become his professional nom d'arte. Born

and raised in Catano, Frankie has studied art since his early teens and in March 1972 the Education Department awarded him first prize in Catano's annual art Festival.

Frankie has been working on the mural—history paintings in Bayamon's Virgilio Davila housing project since mid-1977. There are several island housing projects whose buildings sport murals but as far as is known Frankie's is the only one whose murals also portray historic events.

Some of the themes adorning the project's buildings are happenings in Bayamon's history that are little known. One of these is the slave uprising in that town in 1821 when more than 1,500 slaves on the sugar plantations hatched a plan of

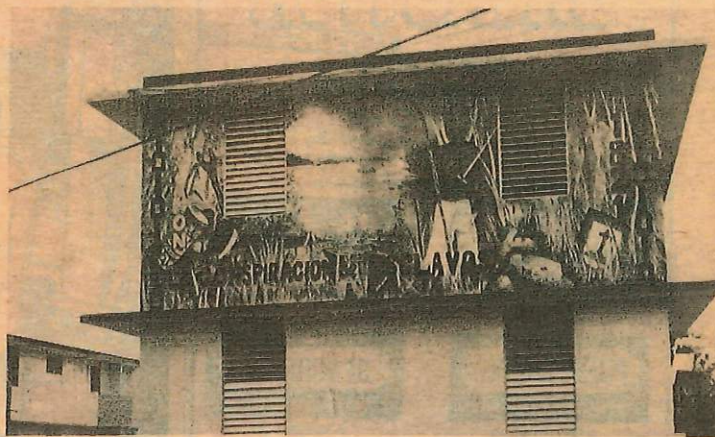
rebellion. The main leaders of the group were Bayamon slaves Marcos Xiorro, Ylario, Narciso and Luis. At present, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture is conducting an extensive study of this important event.

Other themes include a mural of the devastating Santa Ana hurricane. The storm, on July 26, 1825, left 15 dead, about 1,000 families homeless and thousands of acres of crop-rich agricultural lands destroyed.

Currently Frankie is putting the finishing touches on the last mural of the project whose theme is the 18th century sugar mill of the Santa Cruz plantation, around which the town of Bayamon is said to have sprung up.



Francisco "Frankie" de Asis Rivera starts on a mural in Bayamon's Virgilio Davila public housing project.



Slave rebellion of 1821 is one of the themes of the murals