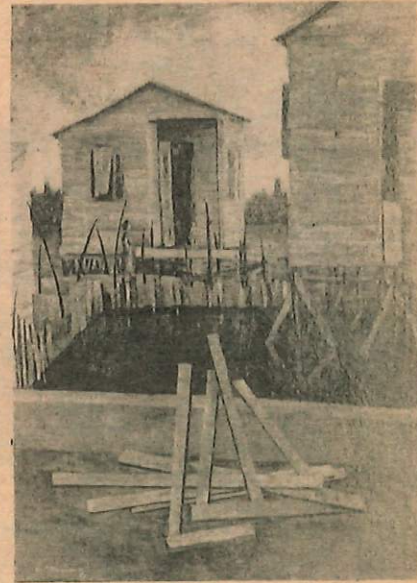


ART

Art as free expression...



"Viernes 1 de Mayo" by Manuel Hernandez Acevedo



"Barrio Talante" by Jose Manuel Figueroa

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Primitivism has been a welcome addition to modern art because it implies spontaneous free expression and intuitive magic at a time that the world in general and Puerto Rico in particular needs it. Our art and life are too pragmatic.

At the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's newly refurbished but as yet incomplete, Museum of Fine Arts on Cristo Street in Old San Juan, some primitive paintings have now been included in the permanent collection. I am happy that these works have at last been put up on the walls with those of other painters from Campeche to our current crop of young professionals to be seen by posterity.

One of the best primitives there is "Viernes, 1 de Mayo," by Manuel Hernandez Acevedo, which shows a fire in La Perla being fought from the seawalls of the boulevard. The fire is discreetly suggested behind the walls, a marvelous sign of restraint. The artist's magic in this picture though, is in dealing with the spectacle of the

firemen and the curiosity seekers who are clumsily clambering over the long horizontal wall to join the crowd and fire engines below, by tying them all together with the "serpents" the fire hoses form. On four long horizontal bands formed by the street, the sidewalk, the wall and the smoke-laden sky, a dance is being danced against the fire-god by totemic snakes, firemen, and the public in ritual acts of accompaniment. We need more straightforward and yet simply designed pictures like this one in Puerto Rico.

The colors of "Viernes," beautifully grayed on the people's silhouettes, perhaps are unnecessarily dark throughout. This darkness in the Hernandez painting is an example of what separates Puerto Rican primitivism from the Haitian kind. Most Haitians as we saw in their magnificent shows lately, paint what the mind sees, as if for the first time in the world and not as they are actually observed to be now. The Haitians freely intensify their colors to decorate incandescence while the Puerto Ricans try to be more scienti-

fically true to life and reality, which is always greyer than ideas.

But the clumsy ritual dance in the Puerto Rican work by Hernandez is almost epically mythical as primitive art is supposed to be and as more of our paintings should be. Few of the Haitian works could be called mythical, since they stick to everyday scenes, to humble household gods as it were. Haiti's more animistic in its religion than Puerto Rico and its cosmos is split-up among many gods. We have fewer gods and sometimes none at all. Maybe we should be more religious as a people or perhaps we should create some gods as Hernandez did in his painting.

There are only four ways to get to know man and the cosmos, through matter as measured by science; through logic as ruled by the mind; through revelation and faith as ruled by theology and intuition and through the senses as ruled by art. There's no other way, political, social or otherwise. None of the four ways of knowing the world should be ruled out. They complement each other.

Leoncio Concepcion is the other real primitive featured at the museum. Concepcion creates no epic myths but watch out for his use of black as a silhouetting device and as a producer of shadows in his pictures. Such signs are ominous. His "Plaza San Jose" seems to be in the mourning because of the black shadows on the brown ground, and the not quite completely saturated reds, greens and blues for the structures, the incidental figures, the vegetation and the sky. Why is the plaza in mourning? Because he sees shadows as black not as the sophisticated impressionists did. But it could also be a comment on the life he sees in the square or of anti-clericalism. Take your choice. He is not saying which.

He is evidently happier in "La Perla." It's the same palette, the same dark for outlines and shadows, the same touches of creams, blues and discreet localized reds for accent. But the brush is singing as he works, although he may be just a little sad inside, evidenced by the wide space between La Perla and the rest of the

GALLERIES

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

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

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.

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"

CASA BLANCA MUSEUM
Casa Blanca. (Entrance at San Sebastian St., Old San Juan. Current exhibit:
Second Salon of University Art

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT GALLERY
Central offices, corner Cezar Gonzalez and Kalaff Sts., Urb Las Monjitas. Mon to Fri, 8 to 1; 2-4. Current show: Paintings by Arcibo art teachers.

GALERIA COABEY
La Casa de las contrafuerzas, Calle San Sebastian. Current Exhibition: "Paisajes" by Analida 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. Current show: "Volando," an exhibit of photos by Marco Kalisch.

GALERIA GUARAGUAO
Callejon de la Capilla, Old San Juan, 723-3836.
Current show: Collective Exhibition.

GALERIA INTERAMERICANA
San German Campus. Current show Group show to celebrate 66th anniversary and installation of president.

GALERIA LA CALETA
70 Caleta de San Juan. Old San Juan. 723-8627. Paintings and prints by proprietor Luis Caligas, 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.

Photographed by PIPO GRAJALES

*"Plaza San José" by Leoncio Concepción**(detail) "Portrait of a Negro Fruit Vendor" by Juan Rosado**"La Perla" by Leoncio Concepción*

city. In this way legends are maintained and created.

Concepción had five dynamic San Juan scenes on exhibit in the recently closed "Arte Primitivo Puertorriqueño," at the Trapiche Gallery in Old San Juan.

Trapiche isn't a real gallery since it's doors are closed most of the time, "against theft," I am told, and the two small rooms are very badly lighted, which propitiates thefts. The five paintings were brisk but nice pot-boilers. Quality control is the one trouble with primitives. They keep pouring works out, but at humble prices, so it is not a gyp at all. At the Trapiche exhibition, there were also seven nice works by Manuel Hernandez, 15 happy scenes by Jose Ruiz and a wonderfully colored church by Isaura Mergal. She is an Op colorist out to outdo the Haitians.

Jose Manuel Figueroa, who also showed at the Trapiche, was once a primitive, actually self-taught, but he apparently eyed the works of the professionals around him at the Division of Community Education where he works to study linear perspective. The

result was his five awkward beginner's works as seen from his drawing table at the division.

Figueroa's two works at the Museum of Fine Arts, in the upstairs gallery, are no longer primitive. The perspective of "Barrio Talante" is quite satisfactory as is its realistic yet haunting yellow light illuminating the dirty world. His sketch of a mountain is unhappily unfinished but it shows how in about two years of work anybody can learn to paint and draw, academically, if only they desire it intensely. Why did he kill himself? What rebellion against a dirty world was his death?

Eduardo Vera's almost primitive, yet very plastic painting, of stray dogs in the museum show has been exhibited in more museums in Canada and the United States than any other Puerto Rican painting. It captured our "poor dog life" myth for art.

Luis German Cajigas' "Calle San Sebastian" of 1957 is quite clumsy, but not quite primitive enough. It's a little tired and rough-cornered compared to his recent works which follow the same pattern. Cajigas, like the image-making santeros, always fol-

lows the same patterns of work. Somehow, however, the recent works are less painterly, too sure of themselves and their correct perspective, though the color in some is quite luminous.

Notice that in the same room with Leoncio and Hernandez, the works by Juan de Prey and Angel Botello are also quite dark.

De Preys' "Canaveral," with its sky and rhythmically over-organized bright green sugar cane has ominous black shadows, as does his "Nina." The same for Botello's "Maternidad," which contains another kind of primitivism but is too sophisticated to be true. Compare his "Maternidad" with Campeche's, "Virgen de Belen," which shows very "primitive" drawing in the limbs. Bad drawing actually.

I cannot stomach Europe's use of the word "primitive" to mean only those works which do not follow the linear and aerial perspective of the Cuatrocento. Only ego-and-man-centered Europe needed to invent perspective to suggest space in art. The other continents created space through the gestalt principles of superposition of planes, placement up

and down the picture plane, declining size and other sensorial hints.

I believe the real meaning of "primitiveness" has to go back to pre-logical thinking when all the parts of the world were animated by magic spirits when man had to be emotionally spontaneous or be killed and when man's cosmo-vision saw the world not as physical facts or scientific phenomenae but as elemental and magic intuitions and archetypes. It is this kind of primitiveness to which Puerto Rico's art should aspire. It is this primitiveness and primeval force which is the source of all great art, especially of true expressionism.

But to do that we have to explode with some passion and thus be able to follow Levy-Bruhl's "law of participation" in the primitive cosmos. This pre-logical passion would automatically "animate" or put a spirit into whatever we are passionate about, let's say, our art. Then our resultant art "totems" would really be potent and epic.

So far we have created more "totems," which means we are more passionate about sports and politics than art.

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.

GENERAL ARCHIVES

Old Bacardi Building, Puerta de Tierra. Current exhibition: "Body Sculptures" by silversmith Robert Friedmann.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO

1396 Goergetti, Santurce. Mon. to Fri. 9 to 4. A summary of history of P.R. in antique objects.

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. Current exhibit: Works by students in Prof. Ernesto L. Roselle's stained glass work shop

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. Current show: "Reproductions and falsifications."

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: Prints and photos by Francisco Copello.

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. Current exhibit: "Grupo frente" paintings by Paul Camacho, Lopez Max Diaz, Luis Hernandez Cruz and Antonio Navia

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: Paintings by the Argentine artist Perez Cells