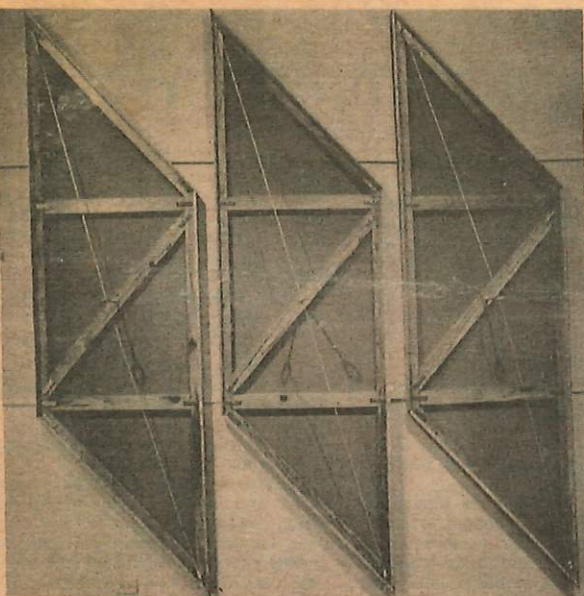
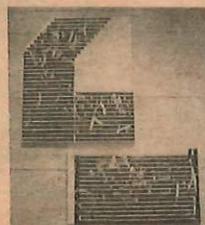


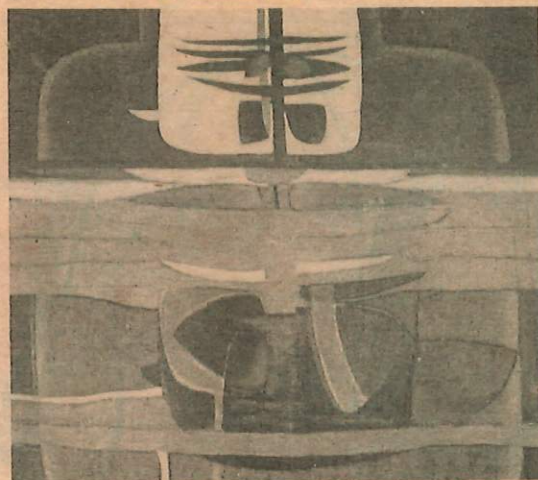
ART



"Progresion LIX", left,
and "Progresion LVI" by
Antonio Navia



FRENTE



"Formas del rito," left,
"Composicion ritual
fondo ovalado" by Luis
Hernandez Cruz.

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special To The STAR

"Frente" was formed in April, 1977 to be a "front of activity to renovate the painting situation in our country," according to Luis Hernandez Cruz, Lope Max Dia, Antonio Navia and Paul Camacho. The four members, among our best professional artists, also joined efforts "to attack the problem of art's delicate situation in Puerto Rico," among them the precarious life of art galleries, the need for diffusion of art in the media, the scanty art criticism and lack of communication between artists and between artists and public.

The group has published two issues of a magazine, "Frente" which includes news of island and international art as well as art criticism. The group has also produced a portfolio of serigraphs for sale at a reasonable price.

Now their first group show — 24 fairly large paintings and the serigraphs is at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's headquarters in Old San Juan where it will remain until March 10.

The show is marred by the inadequate facilities which the Puerto Rico government uses to house art, although the Institute of Culture is not to be blamed; it has to make-do. Our government prefers to build bridges, roads and bureaucratic palaces, apparently figuring that the artists and the institute can always make do with anything left over, including termites. We have no official art museum but

we do have Arctic weather in government buildings.

This show would look wonderful if it had been hung in a modern museum gallery about four times as large as the University of Puerto Rico Museum's single exhibition space. In such a space these handsome paintings would produce a very strong and expansive cumulative effect with their size, colors and tonal contrasts. Instead, they are cramped for individual existence on the small individual walls of the Santo Domingo convent, competing for attention with the domineering dark wood doors and windows. Short-circuited in our vision of the works, we cannot see the exhibit as a whole. And since the exhibition space is so narrow, at no time can we properly view the pictures on the lateral walls. Only the two ends, each with one single work on it, have proper display distance for this type of modern art.

It is as if our government didn't want us artists to know how epic and liberating art can be for the artists and the public.

Inside cramped quarters, our art will always seem small, proper only for small bourgeois living rooms such as those which are the galleries in our newly re-opened two-story national Museum of Fine Art on Cristo Street. Another inherited family facility forced to do museum wonders. A good bird's eye view of our art history cannot be obtained there no matter how the works are arranged on the walls. Thus our history will always seem small and divisible and we shall always feel dependent on unvuncular

hand-outs. The people can go to the large Roman circuses provided by the state for sports and games, since they bring more votes.

The four Frente artists share quite a number of traits in common. They have formed "a front of activity," joining efforts to attack when all of them are soft spoken, deliberately slow-moving and slow-talking introverts — until they are forced to talk. Then they are full of ideas about art since Hernandez Cruz, Max and Navia are professors and Camacho, a WAPA-TV painter, is quite a regular communicator himself.

Ideas are left-brain stuff. This means the group's work is ruled by abstract reasoned concepts, not by the representation of human emotion or reality as such. Happily, this does not mean that their work is purely intellectual — to the contrary, it's quite sensuous too. But while their work does eliminate images or figural representations because of possible emotional charges, it concentrates on spatial and temporal tensions, which are right-brain stuff. Spatial and temporal relationships and forces, especially in the work of Lope Max, are universal and anonymous. Human figures would be accidental, possibly unsettling and distracting to such an art.

Maybe all four can be accused of evading the figure of man because man would be a complication in their present orderly work. They prefer to show us the forces which man has to sense and control as he suffers their effects. So we have to wait for the future of such learning. Maybe man

will win in the end in their work too, as they grow old in compassion and passion.

Space and time tensions are pursued in different ways by our group. Hernandez Cruz sticks to the bidimensional space of the picture plane as it is divided by the swinging arcs of a serigrapher's film cutting knife. The resulting marked areas in the present pictures remain parallel to the original picture plane, enriched by painterly color and texture. Hernandez color and texture are more austere nowadays than they were in his former, similarly planal but more simple, abstract "landscapes" which used handsome broken color in flat but tactile "fields."

Hernandez Cruz evades barroque space with its diagonal sweeps into the picture plane. But, very curiously, his swinging arcs lately are producing pointed horns where two arcs meet and he allows them to live on in his latest pictures. He is thus allowing the possible entry of the panic god, and other figurations, into his pictorial spaces.

The painter had allowed ancestral altars and other such furnishings to exist in his abstract pictures as if in honor of his father's Taino linguistic interests. Now comes the possibility of hooved and horned gods or the feminine horns of the moon, the maternal arche-types which could be married to the fatherly ones for a future art of classical synthesis. Remember his "Dioses de piedra" which he sent to San Paulo two years ago, titled as suggested to

GALLERIES

CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL
Carnegie Library Ponce de Leon Ave. Stop 1.
Puerta de Tierra. 724-1046. Open Mon. to Fr. 9
a.m. to 9 p.m. Sat. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Current show: Ninth salon of Puerto Rican
Cartonists.

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

GALERIA COABEY
101 San Sebastian St., Old San Juan
Current show: Silkscreens by Eliseo Echevarria

GALERIA CONDADO
Convention Center. Open 11-7 every day.
723-6090 Ext. 1832 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: "Vol-
tando," an exhibit of photos by Marco Kalisch.

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

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

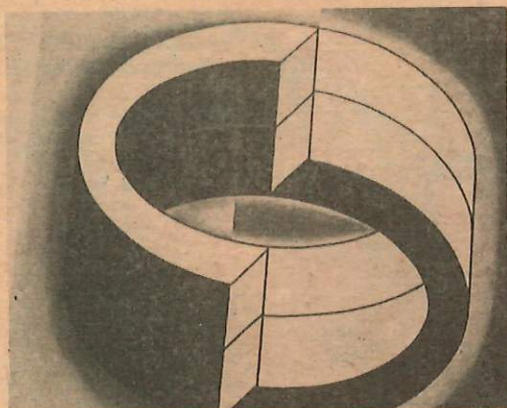
Photographed by EDDIE CRESPO

Luis Hernandez Cruz

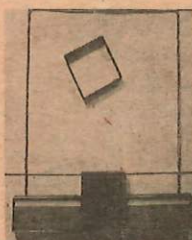
Paul Camacho

Lope Max Diaz

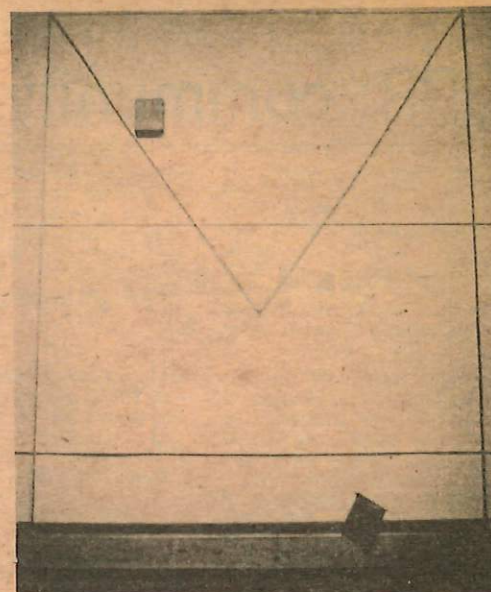
Antonio Navia



"Homenaje analítico," right, and "Unidad" by Paul Camacho



"Ascenso" (two of a series) by Lope Max Diaz



im by the forms of the completed picture.

Even more possibly totemic is his present "Composicion ritual conondo Ovalado," with its red and brown "head form" against a white-cream ground, a simple "portrait" estalt. His "Formas de rito" in this how can also be read as quite totemic as he admits. Blue is dominant here; organic shapes struggle in the lower part of the picture and a median horizontal red swath separates them from the totemic upper white mass with its green horns or leaves against the dark blue background. The red swath controls organicism and totemism. In man's religious history, red blood has forever been spilled when ideas changed from animism, animatism, totemism, organized myths and state religions. The more varied space of cubism motivates Camacho. That's why he presents his dutiful "Homenaje analítico" and "Homenaje sintético" in his show. "I want to document my pictorial roots," he says. "Analytic cubism" with its brushed and austere browns and broken-up shapes and spaces gives way to the simpler synthetic cubism "with its stronger colors, flatter space and even the dark contouring line which Camacho uses.

In his last work in this show, "Unidad," in black, greys and whites, Camacho forced his normal ovals back into the ancestral circle, disorienting space through isometric perspective "from which you can emerge," he says, "un-like Rennais-

sance lineal perspective which draws you inwards into the depths of the picture and then leaves you there."

In all of his later pictures, a kind of soft-edged halo or aura can be seen around the principal shapes. This is a new development in Camacho's work. The halo made me call "Compromiso," expanding universe in my article on the UNESCO Salon, and to my art appreciation classes I suggested that something expansive and important was happening in Camacho's life. Now on this show's opening day I find Camacho is very soon going to marry actress Gladys Rodriguez. So I kid him about about his contention that he tries to say nothing through his pictures except their pure plastic relationships. Pure art is his aim, uncontaminated by anecdotes. But he does admit, "Life can be dealt with through painting. The painting always tells me whatever is happening: I have to listen to the painting."

Space to Lope Max is the actual space in the gallery which the picture could possess if it slid up and down or sideways on the wall, and as the spectator from the floor can assess such movement. He says, "I want the spectator to be conscious of the space which he is in. I don't want the spectator to be lost in any illusionist space I could create in the painting itself." Lope Max first studied to be an architect. Notice the tentativeness of the rope in his three "Ascensos" here, including the M-shaped one. The rope can be pulled up or down, changing spatial relationships.

"Yes, I like geometry," he says, "It's very rational. You can anticipate many of its situations, it is trustworthy.

"In my works, nothing is hidden or anonymous. Not even the nail or nails from which the pictures are hung. The works slide to the floor or upwards. I want the spectator to assess this space as connected to floor and ceiling, vertical and horizontal. Then I want him to see that the materials I use are all homespun — the ropes and nails, the grooved wood, the kind used for wooden in Puerto Rico. The rope accents the force of gravity. The wood, even in the parts which are painted, never loses its grain. Of course such works could be the result of simple manual labor, but they are not. They express man's circumstance in space, the spectator inside. My works are never closed, they are open-ended; something is always left to hazard. I am that much of an expressionist..."

"Yes, the work is not signed on its face, he continues, "but it is not really anonymous either. I could sign it along the wood fibers or as a logo on its face. But if people think of me as a person, then they may not enter into the work itself and into its relationships with space. . ."

Such priestly and devoted thoughts remind me of Carlos (Suenos) Ortiz who "claims that something tells him" he shouldn't sign his works. Of the four "Frente" artists, three do not sign their works. Neither did half, the artists at the Unesco Salon. But

prize-winning Julia Sanchez and Isabel Vazquez did sign.

Navia doesn't sign his work nowadays because he says, "signatures are foreign elements which can interfere with the actual elements of the work itself. And the work has a separate identity from the artist. Yes, I admit my attitude may have something to do with the desired demythification of the Great Artist figure put up by society. It would be ridiculous for a farmer to sign his bananas."

Navia is searching for "absurd space" in his work, not the "optical" three-dimensional space of the classics or the fourth-dimensional one which includes time-a-laEinstein, but the one which is "a sustained moment hanging between real space and no space and real time and no time at all." So the viewer must try to visualize positive and negative matter, time and space as elements in his work.

To accomplish his aim he is using his "Progressions" such as number "LVI" which shows an organic garden-like space being denied both by the white geometry of white lines imposed on top and by the shaped canvas itself. "Progression LIX" consists of three separate shaped-panels in red whose frames are maintained in tension by ropes from raised eyelets but which blithely fly away any time now and progress separately to the ends of the earth. When you go see these four artists and their expanding universes now at the institute, as you should, do not bump into any of the many arches and doors.

ALERIA OLLER

111 E. Escorial 366, Caparra Hts. 782-3171. Open Wed. to Thurs. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Fri. 2-9; Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Paintings and Graphics by Puerto Rican artists.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO

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

NOS

Convention Center, Condado. Contemporary paintings by the Caparra Studio.

LA FORTALEZA

End of Fortaleza St., Old San Juan. Current exhibit: Works by Eli Barreto

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.

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, Lope 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 Celis