

ELISEO ECHEVARRIA

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Economy of means to produce the maximum effect is the beginning of art as it is the beginning of metabolism a budget or a government. Parts are arranged by the manager, in the house or in the picture, in accordance with a desired priority or emphasis, with each part in proportion and rhythm with the other parts.

In economical Coabey Gallery on San Sebastian St. in Old San Juan, economy minded Eliseo Echevarria is exhibiting an economically produced series of serigraphs and four painterly sketches.

Each of Echevarria's serigraphs contains a compact mosaic of many elements, signs, symbols and schematic diagrams, running freely one after the other to form one flat single design which serves as an abstract background for a dominant figure or figures. The figures stand out boldly, alone, in pairs or in small groups. It is an economical system for composing pictures or graphics, an almost foolproof system that may be too foolproof since it begins to look too easy after it is seen in a number of works—as happens often in the work of Puerto Rican graphic artists.

But that's where Echevarria's good psychic and physiological economy comes in. Sure of himself, he takes criticism and uses it constructively, unlike some of his peers. He saw the excessive harmony in his designs, so he diagnosed more variety, as is evidenced by the four sketches for serigraphs in the show.

His sketches use deeper spatial tension than his serigraphs. The flat mosaics are distributed as front, middle and rear grounds though the figures remain emphatic as before. The sketches are very colorful and satisfactorily tactile with their impastoed effects which he intends to reproduce in the final serigraphs even if he has to do it through intaglio techniques. By heavily inking intaglio or indented designs and then printing from them, very painterly impastoed are produced.

The use of pigmented paint instead of printing inks in serigraphy also produces some of this textural or pictorial "matter." Echevarria doesn't get this tactile richness in his present serigraphs because he thinned them considerably to produce the effect of rich transparent inks. His serigraphs

do have a lithoed planographic appearance which remind me of the original color and litho printing perfection of "The Grammar of Ornament" by Owen Jones.

But, what Echevarria loses in pigment thickness he more than makes up for in the number of colors he produces with just four to five serigraphic printings. Every two colors can produce another third color when superimposed transparently on the other. Echevarria's serigraphs are very handsomely saturated with 8 to 10 colors, yet he got them by printing only four to five, a good example of printing economy. Imagine what he could do with 10 printings. To say the most with the least effort, to produce the most with least work or money, is the beginning of any great art.

Echevarria is a contented man in both his satisfactory marriage and his steady work as art director for the Kress stores.

But a well managed house or economically produced art can imply happy but cold pragmatic arrangements. Such happiness could be suspect in art. There is no anguish in the present Echevarria serigraphs. With handsome happy colors they sing of our Taino heritage with rhythmic dances, proportionate accompaniments and emphatic Indian figures in excellent health. No devil, no ogre, no death witch or omen is in sight. It is paradise re-visited, without conscience of its coming loss.

Here again it is his four original sketches which serve as counterparts against the happy but too efficient decorativism of his present Taino serigraphs. The sketches have sharp nervous lines, chopped-up spaces, and modern brooding figures instead of the happy healthy Tainos.

Echevarria is thus coming into our modern Puerto Rico.

It has taken him 34 years, his present age, to claim his very own modern Puerto Rico. He left his native Manati very early in his life to go to New York with his father, an Army man. He was raised there and formed artistically by the Pratt Institute in 1961 and the School of Visual Arts from 1962 to 1964. After such mainstream training he first looked for work in the States, in California, Texas and other such centers where he expected some identification. His professionalism was never questioned.

But he felt as cold as a professional killer or artist for hire. The Puerto Rican streams kept calling him home to spawn. "Life is more confused in the states," he says now, "at

least for us in the minority there. I felt tied to nobody. The states are a caldron. Everything melts down into goo. Here, I am in my own atmosphere. I had no trouble on coming back to Puerto Rico since my professional schooling was over. I had no school or peer tensions. I can relax here."

He had always done relaxed portraits and other designs and figures but with geometrical details or backgrounds, much as most Puerto Rican artists are doing in their work now and since the late 60's when geometric minimalism became rampantly victorious over abstract expressionism or the social realism of the 50's. We haven't produced a real expressionist artist since then except for Carlos Raquel Rivera and Santos Rene Irizarry. The art we produce normally combines pure geometry or statehood with hazardous biology or independence. A classical instinct tells us to marry such opposites, yet such art is produced for the most part by Independentista-minded artists. No wonder many of them don't sign their work.

Echevarria took up graphics in Puerto Rico. Graphics seem to be our strongest popular manifestation in the arts, the most in accord with our eclectic pragmatism. Echevarria quickly went into the Puerto Rican mainstream under Lorenzo Homar at the institute's Graphic Workshop and in the last two years, as part of that insular mainstream, he took up Taino art as a design source. "I had always used some geometry in my work, that's why I loved our Indian ceramics and pintaderia pieces, he explained. "Their design spaces are excellently resolved. Primitive art in other places had always attracted me because of its efficiency as designs. Notice what richness the Peruvians produced with a few simple colors. Such work looks easy but it is very subtle, not easy at all. The same with our Indian designs."

"But I am going now into general Puerto Rican folklore. The Tainos are only part of such rich folklore. I intend to produce richer, more impastoed works on that subject."

Echevarria admits that there is an eclectic coldness in his pragmatic and methodical pursuit of design sources but he is only 34 and has to cover all the ground before he settles into a mature style. He is in no hurry and has no axes to grind. His professional sense of color and design, his inbred and functional sense of economy and hard continuous work will produce excellent painterly works for Puerto Rico even if he sticks to graphics, al-

though I hope he considers painting too.

These four sketches in the present show are delightful in color and strong in resolution. In one of them a white woman and a Taino woman are featured next to a conquistador and a white bearded god against a fallen columnar capital. In another a somewhat beggarly woman is consoled by three men; in a third a woman is being led to a wall, witnessed by a do-nothing man sitting by a table. The fourth is a decorative piece with fish. The absence of titles—since the works were exhibited out of catalog—prevents any further reading of the scenes. I hope he doesn't go into hermetic folklorism!

Do go and enjoy his economical serigraphs. Notice how the art and life principle of emphasis or dominance is used to create unity in his works. The many large human or animal figures stand out, because of unity and size but the dominated mosaic with its many elements holds its own, because of variety, thus creating the nice rhythmic tensions of "Zumbador," and "Areyto." The later is a frieze with small figures dancing or in ritual combat in the background. The mosaic this time should dominate because of its size, its emphatic position in the foreground and its many crisp details, but it does not, it is held in nice tension by the dominant humanity in the frieze and by the accompanying rhythmic dance.

Good but more obvious design is in "Los Amantes Tainos" with its two red embracing figures in a rectangular space within the mosaic which this time is displaced as a rhythmic framing device. Only in "Profecia de Ahmed" does the mosaic unfortunately become dominant due to the flatness of the figures which are white as the white paper, with no modelling. However, in the blue and dream like "Sonali," the recumbent child and the two parental heads dominate through sheer size not by emphatic modelling. The mosaic forms an L-shaped ground full of suggested toys for the child. We Puerto Ricans go for consumerism when our babies are concerned.

A nice global economy or design with beautiful color is in "Jajabi," in which a man seems to admire a sensual figure of a woman but another seems truer somehow as witnessed by the portrait-head of the artist. The mosaic this time has metropolitan psychedelic details, as a goodbye to the Taino details.

Let the folklore show, Echevarria. Eventually it will be our very soul.



"Areylo"



"Nace Aguaybana"



"Los Amantes"



"Sonall"



"Cacons"

GALLERIES

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. Current show: Ninth salon of Puerto Rican Cartoonists.

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: Poligraphy by Joaquín Reyes

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

Second Salon of University Art Casa Blanca. (Entrance at San Sebastian St., Old San Juan.

EDUCATION DEPT. GALLERY

Central offices corner Cezar Gonzalez and Kalaf Sts. Urb. Las Monjitas. Mon to Fro. 8 to 1; 2-4. Current show, Collective show by Art Teachers.

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. 1632 Exhibition of work by local artists

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, Photographs of Albizu Campos.

GALERIA QUARAGUAO

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

GALERIA INTERAMERICANA

Interamerican University. San German. Student Center. Current show Works by former students.

GALERIA LA CALETA

70 Caleta de San Juan, Old San Juan. 723-8627. Paintings and prints by proprietor Luis Cajigas, 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.

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.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO

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

LA FORTALEZA

End of Fortaleza St., Old San Juan. CURRENT SHOW, Collective exhibit sponsored by Galeria la Caleta.

MANOS

Convention Center, Condado. Contemporary ceramics by the Caparra Studio. Current shows, A collective exhibit and works by Daniel Rhodes

MUSEO DE LA ESCUELA DE ARTES PLASTICAS

El Morro Grounds. Mon. to Fri. 8 to 5. Sat. 2 to 5. Current show, Innovative student works.

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: Arts of San German.

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.

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. Current show (opening Saturday): Retrospective Exhibition by Lorenzo Homar.

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