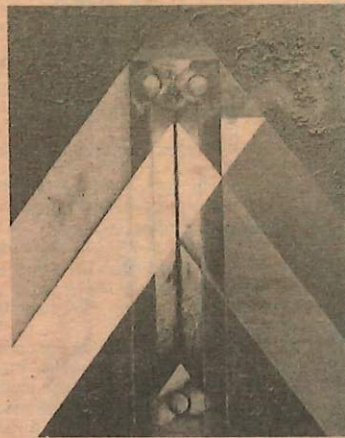
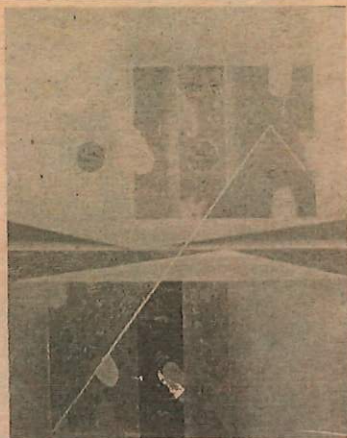
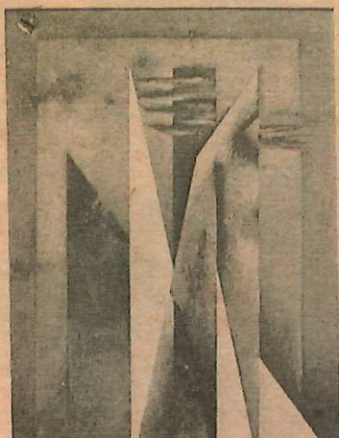


March 5, 1978

ART

# Perez Celis at the UPR Museum



By FELIX BONILLA NORAT  
Special To The STAR

Argentine artist Perez Celis is exhibiting 38 acrylic paintings at the University of Puerto Rico Museum in Rio Piedras.

The work was done within the last 16 months and is quite different in emphasis from his previous paintings. Now they deal with an open dialectical interplay between highly colored and hard-edged geometric bands existing as structured presences in a soft-edged, greyed landscapes. Some have broken horizons, others none at all. The horizons sometimes include textured areas or occasional linear signs such as a cross of St. Andrea. Another sign used is a wide, thin or flattened arrowhead which may also be read as a bird in flight, which I call the paloma-flecha (dove-arrow). It exists vertically in eight works and horizontally in four more.

Sometimes the dove-arrow signs seem to move optically, especially in his latest picture on these walls—not catalogued but very present in the show—"Ecos del Tiempo," an expansive yellow and red composition, where the thin bright red palomas-flecha produce OP effects.

Geometry as human willfulness and biology as random universe are at

war in these paintings as they are at war in today's world. Man the would-be conqueror with his held high banners in full daring color is passing in solitude through a mute grey deserted landscape. Only man's two eyes can be felt as he hides in loneliness behind the vertical bands acting as shields or shelter.

There are no conclusive results of the duel, no winner is yet seen between the combatants, though geometry seems to be dominant in the work because of its emphatic color and tonal contrast. But sudden assertiveness in any fighter can mean the envisioned agony of losing the fight, a last gasp desperate effort before geometry gives in to biology and soul. And the soul may win; lonely frail humanity may win in Perez Celis works. They are in brittle tension on these walls. "Man is tense in his solitude as he treads today's world," the artist says.

Since the symbolic interplay or duel between established structure and humanity is often present in Puerto Rican art, life and politics with no real winner in sight, these paintings may be of interest to us. To be, or not to be. We are all in the same fight.

Perez Celis prize-winning artist who, alone, represented his native Argentina in the 1971 Paris Biennial; who in 1967 was sponsored by the Argentine Foreign Ministry to exhibit at Washington's Pan American Union and in 1970 to exhibit his work at the principal Latin American museums. He was also one of 10 artists whose works were given as gifts by his country to the United Nations in 1972.

There was a serene light in the work he exhibited then, including an excellent series of full horizons with sun and moon which, critic Marta Traba wrote in 1974, identified Perez Celis. A single element that identifies him is the difference between a great painter and an illustrator, she said. She also said that he painted, "lovely geometry that has a gay swing but is at the same time deep and includes hidden situations, symbols to be deciphered and also—why not?—that word which is damned for a painter, 'poetry.'"

The poetry, as well as americanist and sacerdotal implications, was seen in the titles of the 1974 "Horizons," "We Are Being Observed," "Our America," "To the Encounter with the Path," "American Brother," "Sun Oracle," and "May your power reach us."

In 1975 he did a frustrating com-

position, "America: Waking Up Choice," in which the St. Andrea cross first appears trying to cancel the full horizons, and then, the same year, reptiles and inward-going spirals appeared in "Under the Shelter of Our Solar Disc" and "Indo-American Ascent and Descent." The 1975 forms were by an artist apparently starting to be in tension with his milieu and with himself, at least according to the possible meaning of the spiral as a spiral haunting of the self.

By 1976 the far-away full horizons came closer in the picture plane and began to compete with a forefront element as seen in "Portrait," "Flight to the Sun," "Eternity Bird," "Other Suns," "Great Sacred Swan Parahansa" and "Assuming Freedom." The birds began to assume ascendance over the reptiles in "High Flight, Penetrated Land," in which both struggle for the horizon, with the bird on top.

In his rhythmic "Learning to Fly" of 1976 the spiral seemed to go expansively outward, not inward, a hiatus of the initial tension, whatever it was. But "Secret Message" and "The Silence of Our Birds Crosses the Unknown," both of 1976, with their ambivalent spirals, suggested that the hiatus didn't last long. The horizon was no longer full in those three pic-

## GALLERIES

**CARNEGIE EXHIBITION HALL**  
Carnegie Library Ponce de Leon Ave. Stop 1.  
Puerto 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 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.  
Center. Current show Works by former students.

**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. 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.

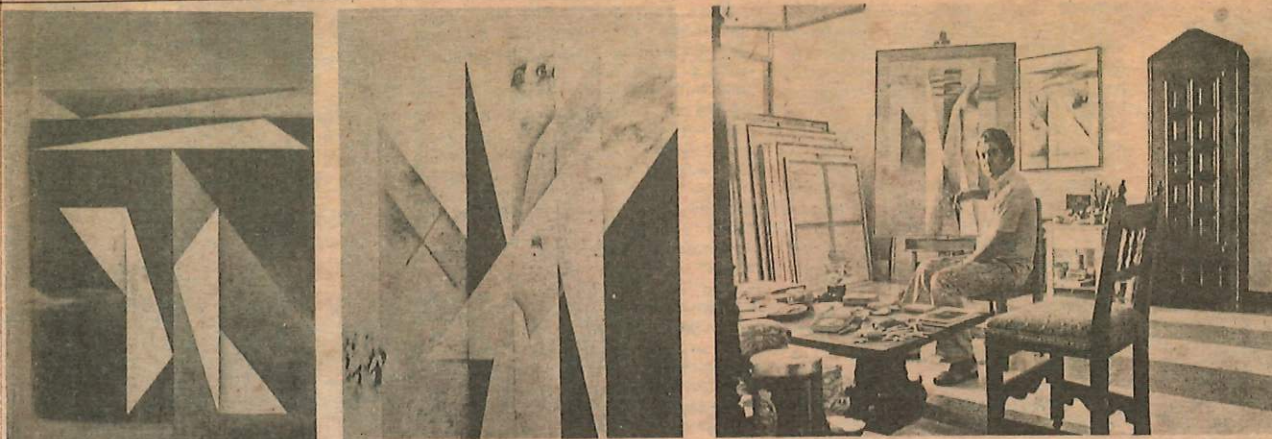
**GALERIA GUARAGUAO**  
Callejon de la Capilla, Old San Juan, 723-3836.  
Current show: Collective Exhibition.

**GALERIA INTERAMERICANA**  
Interamerican University. San German. Student Center.  
Current show: Poligraphy by Joaquin Reyes

**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.

Photographed by Eddie Crespo



Paintings by Perez Celis, from left: "Condición de la imagen," "Las paredes del siglo," "Lo que ven en la noche," "Tiempo del siglo," "Pliegues de la memoria" and "Del otro lado del espejo." A the immediate left, Perez Celis in his studio in Venezuela.

tures. It stopped about two thirds of the way and split into segments.

Perez Celis is now settled in Venezuela, away from the horizontal pampas of Argentina and into the assertive vertical landscape of Caracas with its high mountains and high-rise buildings erect on steep hills. The horizon is split-up there no matter where you look. Birds as rhythmic curves have been banished from his work.

They have become the geometric palomas-flecha. The spirals have also disappeared. Straight lines dominate.

Perez Celis began to earn his living through art too soon in life. He had to kill father off symbolically earlier than most artists, and he did it partially by calling himself Perez Celis. His real name is Celis Perez Gonzalez but the school roll call was Perez, Celis, quite musical, and he adopted it.

His father was Italian and Perez' whole appearance is Italian, smooth and elegant, with flashing yet tender, dark eyes.

Perez Celis was trained academically in figurative art from 1953 to 1957. He started figurative abstraction on his own, maybe because it was a fashion. Then in 1958 when he was 18 he saw the important geometric Vasarely exposition in Buenos Aires.

After that revelation of the power of geometry he went in for strong colors and geometry which he combined initially in his many "horizons." His travels or horizontal conquests since then have resulted in the vertical emblems or banners in this show. From Puerto Rico, he will soon push on to New York.

Let us look again at the show. In 11 of the pictures at the UPR Museum we can see vertical emblems or shields with suggested eyes, beginning with his latest work, "Ecos del Tiempo," and including the white and red "Los que ven en la noche," "El sueño del hombre," and "Condición de la Imagen." Such man-and-image titles imply totemism or the revelation of the self through beasts and gods. But reptiles seem to be missing except as vague sinuous details and the bird is present only in the many "palomas-flecha," in at least 12 of the paintings. Many suggestions of pictographed sun signs, some moons and crosses complete the iconography. It is quite a personal repertoire.

But all the signs and the hard-edged geometric bands of color have a brittle and raw tension. They could break as quickly as pieces of colored glass. Why? "Man's playthings may break in his clasp," the artist explains.

The only exceptions to the brittleness are semi-brittle, like "Del libro de las Mutaciones," in which textured ochre and orange and whites are set against greyed violets and a caricature of a human face is crossed out by a St. Andrea Cross.

In the mysteriously atmospheric "Las paredes del siglo" a massive, dark rectangular temple against a red sky with two ominously moving black moons is reflected, askew, in green waters. An angled straight line in bright red joins the temple to its inverted reflection. There is nothing brittle here except for the thin red line which could have been painted as if moving futuristically, not statically set as it is. Perez Celis considers the painting too "hermetic." I am betting that some day he will know why. It's so simple. The shivery black moon; the temple could be a tomb, a brush with death.

Perez Celis' brush with death came in 1975 when his speeding car rolled over many times. But he is resilient. He is newly married, he has settled in Venezuela and he is full of plans for the future. So the brush with death by itself did not create the tension which can be felt in his present works, but it may have started his psychic motor for the palomas-flecha came then as a sign to his heart.

Mind you, I am conscious of the

fact that the "tension" we have been discussing, could be due to such prosaic factors as sloppy painting, the hurried and serialized production of pictures which allows no time for harmonizing raw geometry with soft landscape. But since he harmonized such extremes in the many "Horizons," the answer, I believe, lies elsewhere.

I believe that at his significant age of 39 that it is his submersion into the rat-race and travel hurry-hurry of art-commerce that is building unresolved tensions in Perez Celis' work as it will eventually in his life. Eventually, because he paints first, then reads his pictures for titles and omens afterwards, as many modern artists do.

Career midpoint and inventory times are coming into his life a little earlier than they do with most artists because he has worked full time since childhood-day in and day out every day of the week—and because his recent brush with death accelerated the reckoning.

His life had been an accepted series of triumphs, a series of lights and expanding horizons until the dark angel intruded, telling him to dig in within himself before his grave is dug. He should be thankful that the sign came early. He still has a lot of energy for the second lap of his career.

#### 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 exhibit: Works by Eli Barreto

#### 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.

#### 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, 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 Celis