

Ernesto Alvarez

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

The rhythmic skeletons in monastic colors do not suspect that they are dead so they keep right on witnessing the world in the paintings and drawings by Ernesto Alvarez now on exhibition at the UPR General Studies library.

The skeletons are not modelled in bones but rather in rhythms, lengthwise along their long contours, never across their length but along it. These unmodelled skeletons by Alvarez are full of bonhomie and are definitely to be looked at very closely. Although austere, they laugh at odd moments.

Why are these compositions resolved with long thin painted lines at play? The lines may be rhythmic lassos to capture the world the way cowboys capture herds. Alvarez may be a lassoeer now as Lorenzo Homar was in 1950 when with such line engravings as "Arab," "Frog" and "Portrait of Susan" he began to capture our graphic world much as Paleolithic man tried to capture the walls of caves with the long parallel lines of "macaroni drawings" which look like road maps. And as continents are captured by long willful roads so Alvarez may be conquering territories after his literary studies. He started in fine arts.

Alvarez's doctorate in literature is a lasso too for it ripens the titles of his

paintings so suggestively that writers may feel impelled to write about his world and students have to smile as they recognize the metaphor which help them visualize the images. Maybe too much so since literature is the word while painting is the color, and color as color is absent.

Only severely restrained color is present in this work and not as color but as tonal, or light to dark, relationships as dusk or the end of the world when all the skeletons rise from their graves.

Why are we afraid of color as color in most painting? Most of Puerto Rican artists see only black to white. Of course that's better than partisans who know only black or white. Colorful rainbow ends shy away from grey worlds anyway.

Maybe Alvarez can catch the rainbow sometime. His lassos won't do it, they are too lineally thin, too willfully in motion to catch color. Maybe Alvarez will settle down and fatten some lines into planes. Planes do capture color. He is starting to do that now in such works as "Genesis," "Pajaro de Fuego" and "Lirios del Testimonio," the latter in a high soft key.

Like Jackson Pollock he could trample all bones into a rainbow osuary. Further trampling into impressionism's cosmic dust of color dots is another way but maybe it's not his persuasion. Line is his pas-

sion, line in rhythmic curves not violent in action, as if he were gently tossing to and fro within the womb.

His "Oceanic Memories," as one work is called, can be seen in the gently tossing compositions themselves. Their movements are not quite baroque nor are they art nouveau, they are in between as dusk is between day and night, a time when color dies and the world is submerged in a violet bath before the dark.

Oceanic memories can also be read in many titles: "Sed," "El agua," "Ondina," "Transparencia," "Bajamar," "En la orillita." His "Jurakan" is shown as a gentle and rhythmic good spirit instead of Yukiyo, the orthodox one. We people in the Caribbean seem to be turning away from Ariel and ethronical Caliban.

Against water, Alvarez uses "Fuego" and "Pajaro de fuego." The latter is a recent work and shows strong color, not quantified with other colors by a dominant color source or chromatic atmosphere. This is typical of those few of our painters who use color such as Felix Rodriguez, Rafael Tufino, Carlos Raquel Rivera, John Balossi, Rafael Garcia and others.

Besides water and fire Alvarez sings sometimes of earth and air, perhaps because our tribe has no great god in charge now, only partisan little gods fighting each other like fire and water. "Cancion de la tierra segun Mahler" is the only green picture here. It has bisexual shapes or signs while in many other pictures in this show the forms are sexual as if skele-

tons were beyond sex. Also as if botany with its many random reproductive devices reigned in this studious twilight world to conquer space.

But space as open and empty territory is evaded since nature is horrified by a vacuum. We could say that Alvarez suffers the horror of empty spaces as nature does. Instead of tropical growth he fills empty spaces with curved vectors, just in case. Notice "Vision de tropical" with its entrapping crisscross pattern.

Other earthy titles include "La semilla encendida" and "El himen de la tierra." Then the seasons: "Invierno" and "Otono segun Glazunov" which stresses the fall that nature suffers then. Why doesn't Alvarez do "Summer" or "Springs?" He is far too autumnal here.

As for air there is "Zum Zum," "Nacimiento de un ave" with its creamy movement and "El aire (Ode to the West Wind)" in the Myrna Rodriguez collection showing a fleshless flutist; then "Una pequena muerte de alas gruesas" with its Neruda implications about death, then "Nubes" and even "Jurakan" may bring air to mind. "Dios?", "Galaxia A-Z-II," "Alturas de Machu Pichu by Neruda," "Hombre y Dios" and "Galaxia A-Z," imply airy volitions, but they remain tied to each picture. There is no empty air at all, it's all been lassod.

Can Mahler's and Glazunov's music cross a vacuum? They cannot—so Alvarez abhors vacuums twice, in empathy with both music and nature.

The state of the art in Puerto Rico

It is important to stop occasionally for an overview of our latest art manifestations. Artists are not just single trees but parts of the forest of art in Puerto Rico. Artists are spiritual mediums for their people.

Two weeks ago I discussed the integrating and disintegrating forces in art composition, what my teacher Hans Hoffman must have implied by his "push and pull" theory and what gestalt psychologists study as the organizing factors of the field of vision or glanzfeld. Let's see the portents in recent exhibitions.

Epifanio Irizarry's work with its cellular growth and atomizing impressionism produced his "Apocalipsis"

and "Desintegracion," I and II, resulting in a cosmic dust or overpopulated picture plane, a razed-down surface in his art, which could be his laboratory culture or cosmovision of Puerto Rico.

Ramiro Pazmino, who has been with us long enough to feel the push-pull effects, produced the disintegration of his previous academic picture plane, destroying Renaissance perspective in his search for modernity. The results as in many recent Puerto Rican works, are a perspectiveless picture plane broken into individual pictures or rectangles.

Our society is broken up into segments, beginning with the party in

power. There are few signs of a search for unity, maybe because the politicians want a head-on collision. Roberto Alberty's "things" grew by loving accretion or summation of organic parts but they were designed to dis-integrate quite easily if pushed existentially by the earth gravity or by hazard. The trigger is cocked by life in Puerto Rico.

We are all alive to such metaphors. Man's efforts like those of Sisyphus or Jackson Pollock's—or Puerto Rico's can end in cosmic dust or scrambled parts. Now, this week we have Ernesto Alvarez's answer: we end up as skeletons who do not

know they are dead. All partisans are alike in the grave.

Last week we discussed the tonal and textured qualities of Isabel Vazquez's work, its titillating hedonistic qualities and its values of touch sensation and of tonal relationships. The youngest of our mature artists, Miss Vazquez like Alvarez, Irizarry and Pazmino is telling us that we Puerto Ricans see only in black or white not in color. That is in black or white individualized relationships not in color as melded members of a team or orchestra.

But artists are like catalytic agents. We are forbidden to act as movers, the better to reflect the ener-

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.

CASA BLANCA MUSEO Casa Blanca. Entrance at end of Calle San Sebastian. Exhibition of works by Felix Rodriguez Baez, "Mariposas sueños y otras cosas."

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.

GALERIA 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: U.P.R. School of Architecture's "Six Graphic Arts Workshop Portfolios."

EDUCATION DEPT. GALLERY
Central offices corner Cesar Gonzalez and Kalaf Sts. Urb. Las Monjitas. Mon to Fri. 8 to 1:24. Current show works by students of all public schools.

GALERIA COABEY
101 San Sebastian St., Old San Juan 723-1018. Current show, work by Isabel Vazquez.

GALERIA CONDADO
Convention Center. Open 11-7 every day. 723-6090. Ext. 1632 Exhibition of work by local artists. Current show: "La hora de diseno," works with watch parts by Jaime Perez.
GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL 900
Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce 725-2617 open 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. Current show: U.P.R. School of Architecture's 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday. Current show: Recent photographs by Pablo Cambo.

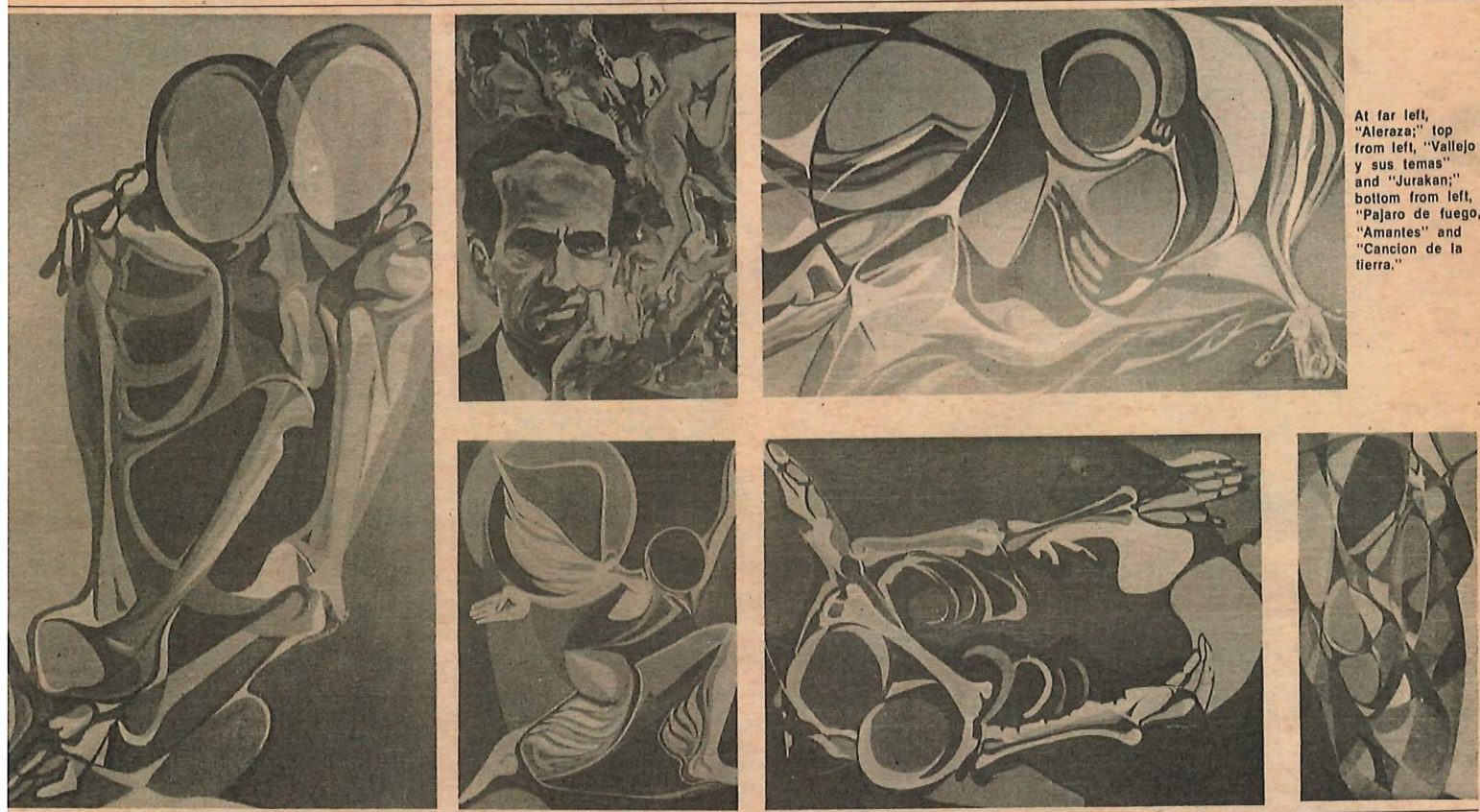
GALERIA W. LABIOSA
415 Sol St. San Juan. 724-6393 Open Mon. to Sat. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Current show: Recent photographs by Pablo Cambo.

GALERIA LA CALETA
70 Caleta de San Juan. Old San Juan 723-8627. Paintings and prints by prop-

Luis Calfias, ceramica, graphics and sculpture.

GALERIA MARIA RECHANY
Magdalena 1363. Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. to Sat. 725-4828. Paintings, and print Puerto Rican artists.

Photographed by Jose Garcia



At far left, "Aleraza;" top from left, "Vallejo y sus temas;" and "Jurakan;" bottom from left, "Pajaro de fuego," "Amantes" and "Cancion de la tierra."

gies of our people. That's why Alberty aspires to be a mirror. He is one of our wisest artists.

Miss Vazquez's chaste eroticism is also typical of Puerto Rico. It is freely admitted yet explicitly restrained like the Alvarez works, "Abrazo" and "Amantes," which are chastely fused into oneness but as if they were posing for the public or eternity. His "Circe" and "Metamorfosis de Semiramis" are rhythmically seductive but beyond glands. Even Julio Rosado's more explicit erotic works are chaste because their fine lines evade too carnal a modelling. Nobody yet dares to be a good pornographer in Puerto Rico. Such things are too

close to home, to our sisters and children. That means we still have a sense of family, no matter how nuclear or even atomized but in any case not as extended, protective and autonomous as before.

Of course industrialization kills the extended family because, worldwide, machines demand specialists. Is that a good reason for the isolation and specialization of our artists in some art principles, and not in the full orchestra of elements and principles needed for great painting? Is that sufficient reason for the partisanship and divisionism of our politicians?

Two unifying art happenings were

held recently in Puerto Rico. One was the recently proclaimed Art Week. It could have united all of us with its impressive listing of group and individual art shows held in Rio Piedras, San Juan, Arecibo, Mayaguez, Ponce and Bayamon by Roberto Alberty, Lorenzo Homar, Jose Oliver, Julio Acuna, Raul Mendoza, and Marcos Irizarry and its many lectures at the museum of Fine Arts Students League, the Ponce Art Museum, the Institute of Culture, Casa Blanca, Luchetti School and San Juan City Hall.

The other reasonably integrating affair was the sale of art work at the

Colegio de Abogados to collect funds to help our youth meet their peers and show Puerto Rican art in Cuba and other lands.

But both integrating efforts got no publicity. I was really surprised.

It is as if "things" are pushing for a confrontation. Maybe it is high time. But I can't read such portents in the art work being done today. Clenched fists are empty of meaning by now. Alberty's "things" are much more portentous. If they fall they can be put back together by "the artist," as Herbert Read saw him, as the integrator of his society.

—Felix Bonilla Norat

GALERIA MUNICIPIO

City Hall, Old San Juan. Old photos from collections of Antonio Molinas and others.

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.

Current show: Paintings by Isaura Mergal

GALERIA RAQUEL

San Jose 257, Old San Juan. Mon. to Sat. 10-6; Sundays 1-6. Mostly oils by European artists.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF PUERTO RICO

1396 Georgetti, 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. Open only during business hours. Show: Collective exhibit in tribute to Dr. Jose R. Oliver.

MANOS

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

Current show: Ceramics by Breeze Griswold Sobek and a collective exhibition by member-artists.

MUSEO DE LA ESCUELA DE ARTES PLASTICAS

El Morro Grounds Mon. to Fri. 8 to 5. Sat. 2 to 5. Current show Works by Graphic arts students of Profs. Jose Alicea and Susana Herrero.

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.

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: 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.