

June 25, 1978

ART

Plastic Arts students show

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture School of Plastic Arts (EAP) is having its annual student show at the UPR Museum. The show merits a visit for many reasons, but the principal one is to get an inkling of how Puerto Rico deals with the formation of its artists.

Our official government attitude about art seems to be one of benevolent neglect. Thank God. Artists are too important a part of our people to be left in the hands of government or any single moulding power. Art needs mutancy or change to subsist in this world since art is ordered change. Governments in power do not like change, to the contrary they want to stay in power.

Establishments such as our fatherly Institute of Culture and motherly alma mater UPR are benevolently left in charge of official art education. They offer three options for art study in Puerto Rico; the third is UPR School of General Studies which grants a bachelors degree after an art thesis and exhibit. (See Carlos "Suenos" Ortiz review, June 11, 1978) I prefer this approach.

The students of the UPR Humanities Art Department have to master more than six hours of content or conceptual academic courses for each hour of formal art workshop courses. Such a curriculum stresses content, not style or form. But UPR students compensate for the stress on content; they go formal; they stress style or sophistication of form if only to produce sure things for graduation purposes. (See UPR student show, May 28, 1978).

UPR teachers know about the curriculum deficiency and therefore stress form expecting content to come forth naturally from the rest of the academic program, a total of 110

academic credits out of the 129 needed for graduation. The result was seen at the show. Nicely finished art works prevailed; form and style prevailed though, and — this is important — content was not lacking. But the emotional, intellectual or plastic content was far too smoothly wrapped within style or finish. There were no mistakes in the works and no bad taste at all. The result was far too sapient or sophisticated. Thus the curriculum stress on academic conceptuality was benevolently subverted.

The EAP show has a coarse look, emotional and unfinished compared to the UPR exhibit. The exhibit itself is far too cluttered and not selective enough. It stutters as to style and form. But what a shock. It has the strength and content of a volcano with the primeval energy that could produce a grand style.

EAP students, the school's beginning, seemed to stress political energies in Mexican style. Now their energies are more varied and as for style, though the work is as yet unfinished in its abandon and variety, the students seem to be groping for answers and form. This anguished, intuitive groping is by itself an important part of the content in the EAP works such groping benevolently subverts the EAP curriculum emphasis on formal workshop training. And so balance between form and content has been struck in both art schools by the students themselves with the help of their teachers. As a Puerto Rican I am proud to see that as a people we can choose any set of complementary opposites the better to make the opposites meet on common ground. This is our classical wisdom. Ever since time immemorial when "official" laws, institutions and curriculums were imposed from above we have benevolently subverted them according to what is "natural."

We are a classical people.

All we need is to produce our classics now.

As you view the EAP show the first impression is of cluttered helter-skelter comprehensiveness as against the UPR's severely limited display. The UPR students themselves without their teachers decided on what to hang.

The helter-skelter impression of EAP works may be due to natural desire on the school's part to show its various departments on equal footing. Unlike the very limited UPR options, the EAP has full-fledge four-year courses in painting, in sculpture, in graphics and then in drawing, design and handicrafts such as ceramics, mosaics and stained-glass windows. Each course is dutifully presented here by at least 10 works for a total of 94 catalogue items, 3 groups expressions (the 1977 and two 1978 calendars) and quite a few uncatalogued pieces. Less works would have been more artful. The institute school doesn't have to prove its mettle through quantity, not any more.

The most professional EAP works in the exhibit are in sculpture and graphics, whereas UPR's forte was in painting this year. Most of the works of both schools are figurative or semifigurative, especially when you take into consideration the titles which compell concepts of either landscapes or figures. Real abstraction is practically missing.

Roberto Thomas presents four "Fotosintesis" wood sculptures. Two of them are organic Henry Moore derivations. But one with a green patina is a nice, simple and slanted slab-conception which uses a large round hole as negative form and smaller holes as textural adornment on the flowingly grained wood surfaces. His experimental maquette piece is constructed out of simple irregular

wooden slats as if to shake off the Henry Moorish influence. I like it when students work both thesis and antithesis forms to proceed to a future formal synthesis.

Adelino Gonzalez presents a head of a woman wrapped up within the awkward lump of her own long flowing hair. Her head is patinaed light against the dark hair, something which is too pictorial or anecdotal for sculpture. Also one of her eyelids is torn now because he abused the wood by carving such raised thin small area. The wood sought vengeance by breaking. The abused part fell off.

The Alwin Velez "Mendigo" or "Pueblo" carved wood bust could have been done by a very good French Republican sculptor at the time of the guillotines. The bitterly questioning look of the proletariat of that marvellous time of rebels and headless kings is very explicitly set forth by Velez, maybe too much so, since overacting is sometimes unbelievable in art.

In connection with sculpture, the UPR offers a miserable option of a few courses of a general introductory nature, nothing to equal the EAP four-year concentration. The reason is that more advance courses draw less than 10 students per semester, so the courses are mercilessly quillotined and Luisa Geigel, John Balossi and Jose Bscaglia are used for elementary duffes such as "Art Appreciation." It is like using rechehorses for farm work, a waste of talent done in the name of economy or austerity.

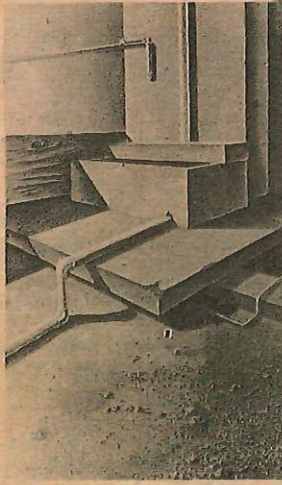
There is a group of conceptual and process art works here which are sculptural too. Notice the two very heavy looking cement-and-rod blocks or constructions by Hector Rodriguez: "Bloque Mental A-1" and "A-2." A-1 hangs in the air and nobody dares pass under it, particles have fallen from it unto the floor. It could crush



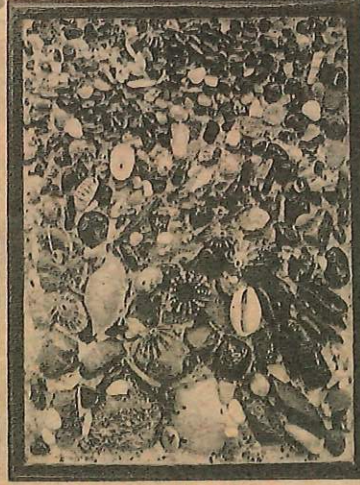
"Con boba" by Felix Vega



"Embarazo" by Sixto Corto



Untitled work by Felix Vega



Collage by Luis E. Quinones



"Fotosintesis" by Roberto Thomas Torres

you... until you notice that it hangs from a single nail in the ceiling. It's pure mental bluff or block, made of foam. "A2" sits heavily on the floor to block your path — until you easily push it aside. Hector's erotic machine "Yo viendo el Desnudo" is a motor-moved umbrella which opens and closes very graphically. His "Mar de plumas" is a very nicely pictorial and colorful mosaic but the double-entendre title is smart-alecky. Even Marcel Duchamp and our Roberto Albery are just too cute with some of their titles which play on words, a lowly kind of humor.

Jose G. Martinez, plays with ugliness in this world as in his beat-up "Homenaje a Duchamp" construction, his process painting "El pasaporte por correspondencia en la provincia" with its veiled and unlighted exit for the colonial situation and his dirty intense "La Aurora" maquette which illustrates a poem on New York's "Four Columns of slime," Federico Lorca is shown dead on a blood-splashed pavement menaced by toy soldiers. The world is ugly, as Lorca used to say, and "nobody sleeps in the world," or in Martinez' world either.

In the graphics section, I loved Irma Sanabria's mixed-media "Raquel" nos. I, II and III, studies on a very intensely contemplative girl and her tactile "Colografia en azul" which quite magically combines angel and beast in a landscape. I also enjoyed Poli Marichal's elegant "Caballo" portfolio of serigraphs and her warm, freely textured, "El ultimo sueno" mixed-media triptic. Dennis M. Rivera has a powerful and large woodcut with a beautifully decorative tonal rendering, "Un Arbol es una Promesa." Sixto Cotto's "El resucitar de un paisaje" serigraph is really an epic landscape, beautifully hued and unsullied by anecdotic homes. Can we re-

ally go there? His "Embarazo Part II" shows a commercially colored tree with a pregnant uterus in its root system. Another pregnant tree is shown by Ruben Quinones in "En espera gestandose," but the foliage detaches itself from the gestating trunk and where will Christ or the hero go at birth?

Two simple renderings drew my attention, "Pomme a ganar tio Buso, con 50 en banca" by Juan E. Garriga is a professional and realistic charcoal and ink drawing of racehorses against a newspaper background which helps add movement to the composition. Quite luminous is the spatter work of both "Sin titulo" ink drawings by Pablo Garcia Padilla. Both show metal grill patterns to throw balls at. A colored collage, "Nina," by Maria D. Rodriguez is quite vigorously expressionistic yet decorative too a la Vuillard.

In painting, "Pensamiento Estructurado," by Angel Nevarez is a bold colorfield play with thickly impastoed pigments. Carmen I. Parrilla's "Azul" and "Roja" are two transparent color fields which could gain sumptuous credibility a la Rothko if she used thicker but not gobby pigments and larger brushes, without brush strokes. Vanessa Pineiro's "Toque Erotico" has good blues and greens but acid yellows and yellow greens since the latter are not quantified (or greyed in this case) by the cool blue light. I do like her swinging composing arcs and her planal textured areas.

Felix Vega's larger paintings, the photo-realistic "Aljibe" water heater; "Sin titulo" plumbing fixtures and concrete slabs with nice grainy sand foreground and the anecdotic "El Pelizco," are all overshadowed by his small serigraph of a young girl "Con Bobo." Dionys Figueroa's "Elegia a la Republica Dominicana" is quite



"Bloque mental A-1" by Hector Rodriguez

somber with its limited blacks and red. Adrian Garcia's large painting here is overshadowed by his small playful "Sin titulo" mosaic of the Great Mother and his stained glass picture. Betzaida Gonzalez' planal sketches are all red, green and ochre.

Why does she evade blue?

As a UPR student told me, "The show is more experimental than I expected, and less political than it used to be and there is less copying of their teachers' work. They have grown up. I am glad we invited them here."

GALLERIES

ART STUDENTS LEAGUE

Plaza San Jose, Old San Juan. Open daily, except Sundays. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Tuesdays and Wednesdays to 9 p.m.

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: Portfolio of Pan-American Prints.

CASA BLANCA MUSEO Casa Blanca. Entrance at end of Calle San Sebastian. Current show: Recent paintings by Martinez, Rodriguez, Messey, Moyano, De Pedro and Miranda.

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."

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.

GALERIA BOTELLO

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

GALERIA COABEY

101 San Sebastian St., Old San Juan 723-1018.

GALERIA CONDADO

Convention Center. Open 11-7 every day. 723-8090. Ext 1632 Exhibition of work by local artists.

GALERIA DE BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

102 De Diego, Santurce. 725-1135. Mon-Fri 9-9 Sat & Sun 9-6 Sculpture and Graphics. Current show: Soft sculpture by Lucia Waiser

GALERIA DE PALMAS DEL MAR

Palmas del Mar, Humacao. Mon-Sat. 10-1 and 2-6; Sunday 2-6. 852-3450 Ext.2507. Works by Roberto Moya and others.

GALERIA FOTOGRAFIA PL 900

Ponce de Leon 900, Santurce 725-2617 open 9-5 daily except Tuesday and Wednesday.

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 MUNICIPIO

City Hall, Old San Juan. Current show: Collective show 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.

GALERIA RAQUEL

San Jose 257, Old San Juan. Mon. to Sat. 10-6; European oil paintings.

GALERIA W. LABIOSA

415 Sol St. Old San Juan. 724-6293. Mon-Fri. 1:30-5:30. Sat. 9-5:30. Puerto Rican art.

MANOS

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

MUSEO DE LA ESCUELA DE ARTES PLASTICAS

El Morro Grounds Mon. to Sat. 8 to 5. Current Show: Works by sculpture students of Tomas Batista and Rafael Lopez del Campo.

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 Contraluzes, 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 show: "Album de familia y obra grafica" by Antonio Martorell

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 Sunday, 10 to 5. Current show: Works by Institute of Culture Plastic Arts School students.