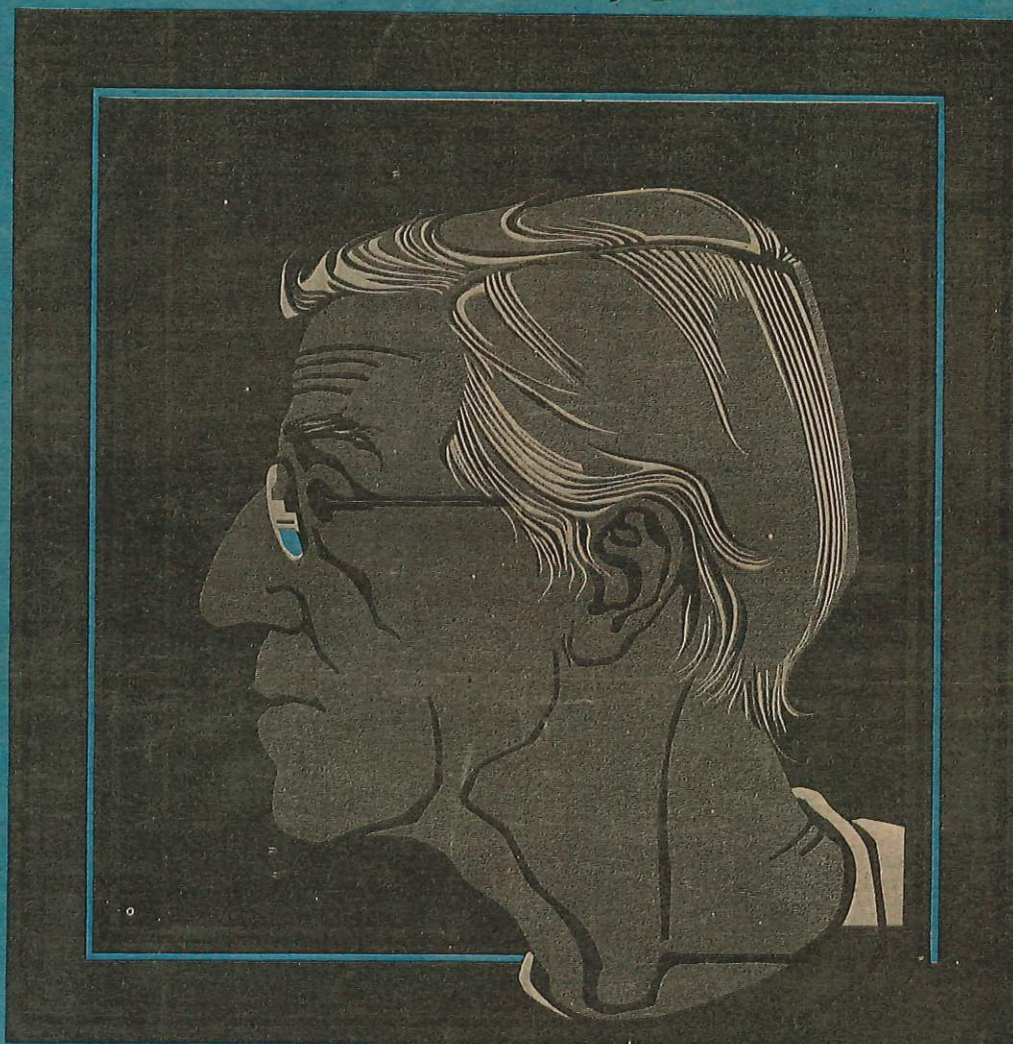


EXPOSICION RETROSPECTIVA

DE LORENZO

Hornar



Museo de Arte de Ponce

18 DE MARZO AL 20 DE JUNIO 1978

HOMAR



Top row (opposite page) from left: "El Mercader de Venecia" poster (1964); "Bonito norte a la cancora" (1966); "Homenaje al Dante" poster (1965); Texto Amades (1962); "Vanessa" (1975). Bottom row from left: "la isla" (1965); "Teatro PNP" (1970).

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

Lorenzo Homar's really comprehensive exhibit at the Ponce Art Museum closes in a little more than two weeks, on June 20. It may not come to San Juan at all. More than 20,000 art lovers have seen it already. It is a must.

The show is comprised of some 365 works, of which 330 are listed and 63 shown in the excellent catalog which includes eight color plates. Homar himself traced all of those works (He keeps a record of his production, unlike many of us with less discipline and he helped design and put the exhibit up. Now you can see him full scale as an artist.

The nicely printed 112 page catalog includes illuminating articles by Marimar Benitez, Ramon Arbona, Mari-Carmen Ramirez and Rene Taylor. No Puerto Rican artist ever before had such a catalog while alive, and none has ever exhibited so many works at one time in such splendid premises.

The scale of most of the works is such that they have to be seen closeup almost like a jeweller's precious work. Thus the large exhibit space is chopped up by the display arrangement; the works could have been shown easily at the UPR Museum or the Institute of Culture's chopped-up spaces with possibly more intimate or satisfactory effects. However, it was nice to see a whole large wall hung with Homar posters and to compare their simple gestalts or configurations from afar; his compositions are simple and direct. But at that long distance the richness of his many-layered matter—the result of as many as 30 successive printings in some works—is lost, to be appreciated by the initiated if at all, not by the masses.

Each successive color printing makes his serigraphs more expensive to produce, thus removing them from the humble living rooms of the masses.

ses he has wanted to reach since the 1950's. The masses merit good art quality, yes, but they look pragmatically askance at the precious gem-like quality Homar insists on pursuing in some works. Economy of means, saying the most with the least effort, is art's beginning on this earth. Gems are translucent, slow, many-layered formations which Homar learned to love and paint as an artist for the Cartier jewelry world, a rarefied world far away. Why does Larry insist?

The 1974 "Autoretrato" multi-layered enamel serigraph in this show may explain. Homar is presented as usual, chin out and quite severe and discontented as he looks askance into the world, his eternal adversary. But why did he place himself in the part of the picture? A dark blankness which could be a school blackboard or an empty picture frame dominates above and behind his figure; Homar places himself humbly under it, uncharacteristically. He has been a good teacher though he knows he still has to paint his masterpieces. Most important yet, a shadow is allowed to fall on Homar, again most uncharacteristically. The shadow covers his shoulders and the lower part of his face — only his white hair, forehead and cheekbone are in the strong Baroque light as if he dared the shadow to take away his body and jaw; he keeps his skull; his brains, his ideas.

Homar giving away his jaw to the shadow? That's unbelievable! He never talks like that, why does he present himself that way?

I first took stock of Homar when he started to work for the Division of Community Education. I remember that he was steadily talking away about politics and art while at the same time he was blithely engraving directly on metal, quite a dangerous work since the engraving or incising burin is a very sharp tool and it loves to plunge into flesh, which it can maim. I knew the newcomer was showing off for our benefit, which is natural. But I had to admit he did

have the steady hand necessary for the job; he kept twisting the metal plate underneath not the tool above. A professional.

Later, for the production of one of his posters, I suggested that some discreet textures would enhance the design. He immediately saw why at a time when most posters in Puerto Rico were produced by flat "pro-film" cut areas, except for Julio Rosado's previous tusche-glue experiments for the face of the girl in "Una gota de agua." Thus Homar proved to me that he had the eye necessary for a future in the job.

In those years he was producing engravings and even linoleums with very long rhythmic sweeps of the tools and the forms, such as in "Sapo chiquito," (1951) and others in this show. The long lines were like lassoes out to capture the world and with them Homar proved to all of us that he had the necessary ambition to succeed in our slow-going milieu.

But then Homar didn't get a painting prize in the 1954 Ateneo art contest. He had sent his exquisitely finished painting "Disparate," present here. It was not mentioned by the jury. He resented it, as may be seen in "Laudo kilometrico," a linoleum caricature done some years later, also present here, with its marvelous characterization of the jury.

Homar's intense personal idealism is such that "the world" is normally his adversary anyway. He is never quite content with it and loves to fight it, initially maybe because he was the second child in a family of four children. Second and third children may be discontent because they are not news in the family; the first born most times remains the favorite.

Homar is news now and is not taken for granted. As a child he took to the visual arts while his brothers studied music. Their mother was a musician, a pianist. The oldest work in this show is a 1937 crayon portrait of Homar's brother Fernando, playing his saxophone in New York,

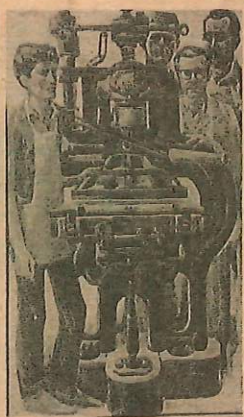
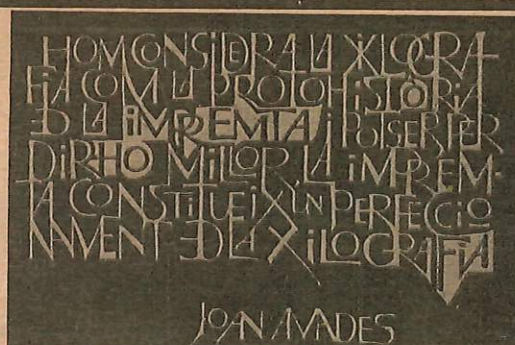
perhaps asserting both his heritage and his independence as the third born peer.

Next comes a 1938 crayon portrait of their father, Lorenzo Homar, shown here reading the newspaper with a severe concentrated look, and with his pugnacious jaw thrust at the paper much in the way that Homar now thrusts his at the world. It was his father who gave Homar his first box of colors in Puerto Rico, a box he still keeps to hold his thrusting engraving tools. It was his father, Larry once told me, who by 1929 had to wash dishes for a living in depressed New York City whereas in Puerto Rico he had been a known motion pictures distributor with horse-racing and cultural interests. Larry was thus waking up to the world's discontented, his own people.

But ancestral primogeniture patterns are not the only explanation for Homar's permanent and "divine" discontent.

Done between the two crayon portraits there is in the show a bleak 1937 urban landscape "163 and Amsterdam Avenue" in ink and watercolor. In just such an environment Larry Homar had his first experience of New York: a malevolent street gang pounced on him there when he first set foot on the sidewalk outside his home.

Ever since then Homar has been ceaselessly pouncing back at a society which created such minority patterns. He is his people's defender, their Saladin, against such sidewalk invaders as "tourists," whom he has pictured in many works in this show. All "tourists" are pictured as ugly because even though he once told me that his family name may have started out as Omar in Spain, (another possible ancestral source for his discontent) he doesn't consider himself a Saladin when it comes to allowing peace with dignity for the enemy crusaders. He gives no quarter as he asks for no quarter in a fight. Street gangs in New York give no quarter.



... (starting on page 8), from left; (Homar's hands from catalog cover) "La mujer de Barceloneta" (1952); "Festival Casals" poster (1966); "Lelolai" (1952-53); "El taller de graficas" (1965); "Unicornio en la..."

And the US Marines and other troops gave no quarter to the Japanese troops in the Pacific. Sometimes Japanese prisoners were killed outright disregarding the laws of war. Homar ought to know, he was there for almost four years (1942-46). It was a terrible war, with fear on both sides. A live prisoner could mean death if you weren't careful because the Japanese gave no quarter either.

As a witness to those years, there are in this show some lively sketches of Army pals and a sketchbook mutilated by mortar fire. The sketchbook was the result of a five-day and night scouting mission into the Japanese-held island of Palawan and it bears a "tribute to the wonderful support that the Guerrillas offered us ... we got even more information than expected." Homar does pay loyal tribute to loyalty.

In the same case with the sketchbook is a "Nepa Hut" drawing with ink and saturated water colors, then a sketch of Jinse, Korea with more refined hues. Influenced by Japanese art, the abstract color of Puerto Rico pursued Homar into the Pacific. In the blue and greenish waters the red blood of a sinking soldier expands luminously and then disappears into the multi-layered mysterious depths very far away from home. Such nostalgic reminiscences of Puerto Rico as red blood flowers sinking in translucent mediums, I had on Normandy beaches.

Such nostalgic effects are seen in the multi-layered serigraphs of "Portafolio Casals: Tres estrofas de amor para soprano" (1971-72), especially in the one titled "Coda mar adentro y flor de tierra" with its blues which range from greenish to purplish beautifully dramatized by the reds of flowers from orange to purple. The others are not so beautiful, and will lose color with time as blood loses its color and also because the different layers of paint will become more transparent in less than 10 years and act on each other dulling contrast.

Carmelo Fontanez has had similar experiences with color glazes. They fuse murky. But Homar insists on using layer after layer. Why?

Each of the above landscape serigraphs was transparently printed from 25 to 29 times. Each successive layer or printing was decided "during the process itself" as Homar says, "without finished sketches." Such an undisciplined plan of work even for simple landscapes doesn't sound like the efficient Homar I used to know in the early fifties. So why does he keep at it?

He keeps at it because he is Homar and he will never give up on a fight. There was once an Homar who defended the Miramar drawbridge against the English, not far from where Larry has his workshop now. He keeps at it to sublimate his desire to paint in the many mixtures of artist varnishes and inks he uses for serigraphy instead of painting with them. "Good inks smell like oil painting" is one of his stated excuses for using them. They are more agreeable to him than the more heavily pigmented and possibly more permanent silk-screen paints. He realizes that "either you paint or you don't" and yet he practices serigraphy because "it allows me the opportunity to develop the use of color."

But color is what separates painting from the other arts; they don't need color really. Painting does need color but as color, not color as light except in Baroque painting which is Homar's style. Homar models forms under light's modulations, tonally, from light to dark. He doesn't model with hues as Cezanne did. Missing always in Homar's paintings is the always cool penumbra or glancing light between the lights and darks. Matisse (and even Rembrandt and Velazquez sometimes with their "verdaccio" penumbras) taught us that light, penumbra, and shadow areas can each have a different hue if the penumbra is cool and if each area or

hue has the necessary saturation or chroma and the necessary total value needed for the area.

As a matter of fact, Homar must be conscious of this problem because in his 1964 painting, "Laurita," he used many full-colored value-five pigments for the shadows as Roberto Moya does now. But then Homar went into "Laurita" with unquantified whites and creams for the lights and he imposed on the background with plain unquantified white, resulting in an artificial kind of matter and illumination. He should have kept up with the painting problem. He was facing the painting truth then but the graphics called him back. They seem to be his direct natural medium, his true love; his painting suffers then.

But Homar can be painterly. By painterly I mean the normal delight that a painter feels for his tools, materials and effects when they come up to their utmost explicit but also natural effectiveness. Homar delights in effective painterly brushwork as can be fully appreciated in this show though sometimes it is for theatrical reasons, not for the necessary natural effectiveness. He is also delighted by the smell of his painterly materials, the mixing, the glaze-on-glaze manipulations. Sometimes we have talked for hours about such painterly matters when other things separated us in people's minds. What do those other things count for when painting and art are concerned?

Homar has gotten color glow in some of his serigraphs. Notice "Texto Ruiz Belvis" (1973) with its many bright reds turning to purples. These reds and black surround grey greens and yellow greens very effectively. Notice the almost optical art effect of "Gimnasia femenina, 1977" with its sweeping rhythm of glowing color.

Another Homar strength is as a graphic portraitist, illustrated by the many verry portraits in his "Claridad" sketches which also came out in book form. Homar the portraitist, especially in many of his posters here

in this show, will outlive many of our official portraitists. His characterizations stay more in our mind's eye. Notice that he doesn't evade showing the hands when necessary for emphasis.

Homar has always had a good press because he has earned it doubly, first with his fine work, then with his steadily held opinions about our world which have news value because of his renown as an artist. The catalog's frontispiece is a reproduction of Homar's 1967 xilographed Martin Fierro quote: which ends; "Pero yo canto opinando, que es mi modo de cantar" (I sing by giving opinions, that is my manner of song).

Both Homar and his work in Ponce are really a chronicle of opinions about this our world. Homar could have put an even larger show up than this one in Ponce. He eliminated many good posters and other works such as the very fine engraving of his daughter Susan he was doing when I first met him.

But the question is, why did he put up such a large exhibition? Many things in this show do not add anything to his stature, they take away. In this the 65th year of his life, as Ramon Arbona says in the catalog, Homar is exhibiting "all of his life. He has come, Arbona continues, "to the point of no return; there are no back steps nor corrections, no rectifications."

How true. This is Homar's moment of truth. He has played fair with us, hidden none of the evidence. We are left with Homar's very revealing "Auto-retrato" with its shadow, and with Homar's explanation of translucent mediums: "You look at tranquil waters and the color is more profound, more mysterious. I prefer it then."

Above all, when we picture him vaulting in the air, daring the enemy and the vacuums he could fall into, we read his 1968 linoleum cut quote from Shakespeare: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport."