

FELIX RODRIGUEZ BAEZ

By FÉLIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to The STAR

Felix Rodriguez Baez, director of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture Plastic Arts School, is holding an exhibit of his work now at Casa Blanca.

The 30 paintings and 12 drawings, titled, "Dreams, Butterflies and Other Things," and signed "Felor," will remain on view until Friday.

"It's not a conclusive show yet," he tells me, referring to his work, "just as in my exhibit two years ago, I am still getting my measure."

I have always respected Rodriguez Baez, because he is self-critical, as we teachers tend to be. I don't think it is a pose at all. Nor is it an exaggerated sense of history or an attempt at disarming any critical brick-bats. He is simply a reasonable man. He reasons better than most painters I know and his reasoning is down-to-earth and explicit, not highfalutin at all. This trait was sharpened by his many years as a TV executive and honed in the arts school.

Sometimes objective and executive abilities interfere with the magic of art. But if Rodriguez Baez is critical of his work it is because he is sure of himself and knows that painting is a jealous mistress that demands full-time attention for a lifetime. He knows it is a question of time and "dreams." He has them. He even writes private poems about them, and paints them in this show.

Now 49, he paints every afternoon and night, but not always what he wants to. The many requests he gets for made-to-order works bother him. "Like cockroaches they eat my time," he says. "We have to learn how to kill times' cockroaches."

At the same age of 49 Goya painted his two duchesses of Alba, dressed and undressed, and then, maybe because the lady forsook him or because he began to be deaf, he closed himself inside the Villa del Sordo and produced his real masterpieces, the magnificent works we know him by. Up to that moment his time had been eaten by such cockroaches as bull-fighting, machoism and flighty loves. His designs for palace tapestries and portraits were simply regional anecdotal potboilers, just good enough for one regional museum in Spain. Now those potboilers are important universally because of what came later. Great painting came to Goya willingly when he wil-

lingly devoted himself fulltime to the jealous mistress.

Maybe in the above context we have to see his two versions of "El Otono del patriarca," not that Felor considers himself a patriarch. Four clocks, three bird cages, imprisoned butterflies, old phonographs which spout imprisoned music, a telescope to capture space and many closed trunks and other enclosing vessels crowd a living room into which a Garcia Marquez patriarch enters, flowers in hand. Two women wait like object vessels too, a gray old lady works on something like a doll while a younger one sits in an alcove expecting the visitor. Later she will wait no more; she will disappear into the sky which is seen as the ceiling of the pictures. The patriarchal dictator will be left alone.

"Are you in your autumn now?" I ask Felor, "surrounded by these many things here in your living room?" His work and living space on Sol Street seems crowded at first glance but is really organized.

He smiles at the patriarch dig. "It was the Garcia Marquez book that started me with its emphasis on time and on time's nooks and crannies. They take revenge even on dictators. But maybe my fix on the theme is due to hidden personal necessities, who knows?"

The two pictures are miles apart and unresolved. One is in old Felor's social realist style, with tonally modeled forms, and in three-dimensional busy perspective. The other with the same elements, is chopped up into a flatter effect but it doesn't dare to go into cubistic arrangements. Both tell me Felor is on the hunt for a style. He has to solve this patriarch problem picture in more ways than one before he can settle on his final work.

I suggest that he study his two "Angustias" in this show for a good

solution. One is unresolved and has touches of several stylistic searches but in the second is seen Felor's heart and capabilities. It's a striking work, economic of means including color and definite in statement. Notice the anguish of the mother figures. The youngest one is being caressed lasciviously by an androgynous figure. Another is shadowy, accompanied by a standing-up child. Both are witnesses of the anguishing close quarters of slums where sexual deviations can so easily occur. Many "Mariposas" in this show tend to Lesbianism as an experiment.

That Felor's heart is in the above work can be seen in "Arrabal," showing, with anguish, a chopped-up slum house, peopled by similar figures as those in "Angustia." Such resonant adumbrations are an important clue to a continued love of a pressing subject, in this case La Perla, which Felor used to paint so intently in the fifties.

Then they were without people, now the people are seen first. He grows thereby.

Intensity and resonance are not felt in such patriotic potboilers in the show as "Hasta la muerte mi comandante," where Che Guevara's head and a suffering mother are hot reds and oranges against too cool a blue. "Ideal que no muere" is as unresolved in its painting solution as our status problem. "Profesionales de la macana" about the police is too split up in design. No pun intended.

But less political items such as "Botellas," "Tres Ceniceros" and "Cenicero" are also innocuous exercises with their localized colors, and "Mariposa Playera" is unresolved with its warm ochres against blues and greens which are too cool. Most pictures in the show are cool green with few hue changes.

Interesting but badly resolved is "El Siempre Parao," a commentary on

Carlos Irizarry's Popular Party ideals. The picture's two warm cellular shapes do not fuse with the superficial blue background though some textured patches are quite painterly. But they do not stay within the picture plane.

Better composed is "Frontispicio," a commentary on the four "Frente" artists. The portraits of Antonio Navia and Luis Hernandez Cruz are marvelously direct. The four serious Frente figures stand out deadpan against an erotic background of a woman with nice large buttocks. "This is too personal a commentary on your colleagues," I tell Felor.

"I was only kidding them: they take themselves so seriously! I am betting they can't see the woman's nice gluteus maximus just behind them." Felor's laugh is quite disarming.

The feminine buttocks region is featured in 14 works in the show including 3 drawings ("Gluteos" nos. 2,5,6) and the exhibit poster. But why does the region show in so many works? It seems to go beyond normal erotic interest. There must be other meanings.

The buttocks belong to nice Lolita types in "Mariposa Colegial," where the eternal ritual UPR protesters are witnessed by the girl. Round buttock-like shapes also appear as trees in several (not very good) landscapes here, as ashtrays in a few still-lives and in other "objects" besides the Lolitas. So it is a kind of pressing archetype in Felor's present state of mind and is mixed with his title for the show, "Dreams, Butterflies and Other Things." Butterflies are first a worm-like larva, then a mummy-like pupa, then a candidate for flight, then a flyer. The body of the butterfly is penislike, as Felor shows in some works here. The wings are like conquering round rhythms to capture both space and erotic sensations which Felor also depicts as ant-produced rhythms in "Tus manos atrajeron las hormigas" and as earth dwelling presences in "Tal vez, al nacer, te dieron alas," the biggest quite rhythmic feature of the show.

"Tal vez" again depicts a Lolita. There seems to be a love-hate relationship here or maybe a fear of woman as temptress and eternal enchantress. The greens and blues of this picture seem to repel the reds, which may be seen as the sign of the Great Mother, the only life giver. Man has no life-giving vessel like hers; sometimes she is depicted as a cave whose dragon has to be slain to liberate the fair maiden beyond.



"La mariposa y la muñeca (detail)"

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. Current show: drawings and graphics by Carlos Suenos Ortiz; "Prehistoria erotica"

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.

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."

GALERIA COABEY

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

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 725-2617 open 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

Fri. 1:30-5:30 p.m. Sat 9-5:30 p.m. Watercolors and other works by Labiosa.

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.



Top left, "Arrabal;" left, "Sueno 6;" above, "Erendira la noche de su desgracia."

But maybe the only thing to be read in these pictures goes before or beyond St. George. Felor thinks maybe he hasn't painted his masterpieces yet. The "vessels", his pictures, are still empty, not as full as he himself would like them to be.

He can fill them with the angst of

"Angustia num. 2." Even "Mujer-mascara" is another candidate, though less new in Felor's repertoire. I notice "Mujer-mascara" is not for sale. This is his second try at the subject. It has an intense look and its intense colors are in tension with the obvious small touches of neutral

black and white. Normally, his palette is in greens and reds, but not too varied in hue or in saturation. His "bienio bicentenario" uses blues well, with interesting patterns of warm sensuous yellow-orange lights and nice grays.

Felor did better in this show than

his last one. The present one is more meaningful and personal. But he has to resolve some painterly problems, especially the quantification of his colors. Then his patriarchal archetypes will fuse into painting and the "vessels" will be fuller and up to his critical standards.

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; Current show: works by Marta Heros and L. M. Ruiz

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. 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. 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. Current show: 10th Annual Exhibit of Finer Arts Students Work.