

# P O R T F O L I O

## Lopez Dirube in the Big Leagues

By FELIX NORAT  
Special To The STAR

We have in Puerto Rico a good bunch of painters, sculptors and graphic artists who can compete in foreign lands and art markets. Naturally and chauvinistically we are happy whenever a Myrna Baez, a Luis Hernandez, Lorenzo Homar, Antonio Martorell, Marcos just as Irizarry and others are accepted by foreign art critics just as when our boxers and other sports figures are accepted in the Big Leagues.

The latest Big Leaguer we have is artist Rolando Lopez Dirube. Not that he hasn't had such successes before in Spain, the States and elsewhere, as will be firmly established by a beautiful book on his life and work to come from the Editorial Playor presses in Spain. The book is sponsored by ALA Art Editions USA, with texts in both English and Spanish, and contains 335 large illustrations, including 107 in full color. His wood sculptures, are a revelation, as will be his sculptures in cast concrete. None of our present sculptors have really understood wood and concrete as well and as extensively as he does.

Dirube's latest Big League affair was his resoundingly praised exhibit of 17 hard wood sculptures and 30 drawings at the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art. Many Venezuelan critics and commentators interviewed him for the press, TV

and Radio. They speak of "The splendor of thought and matter" in Dirube's work and personal presence; of his work's "intensity" in dialogue; of "Dirube on wood, mathematics and silence"; of the "sculptoric intelligence" of his work; of "woods, sculptures and sensuality" in his art; of his "caressed woods", etc. There seems to be a lot of interest in art in Venezuela and many channels for its evaluation: Dirube got more than 30 media exposures.

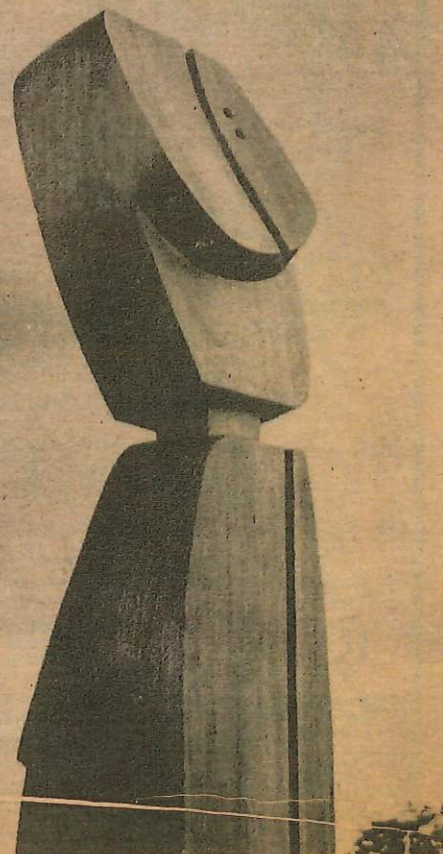
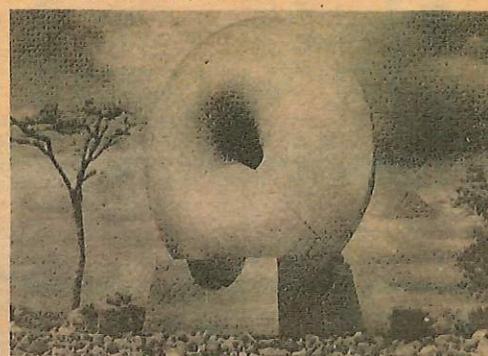
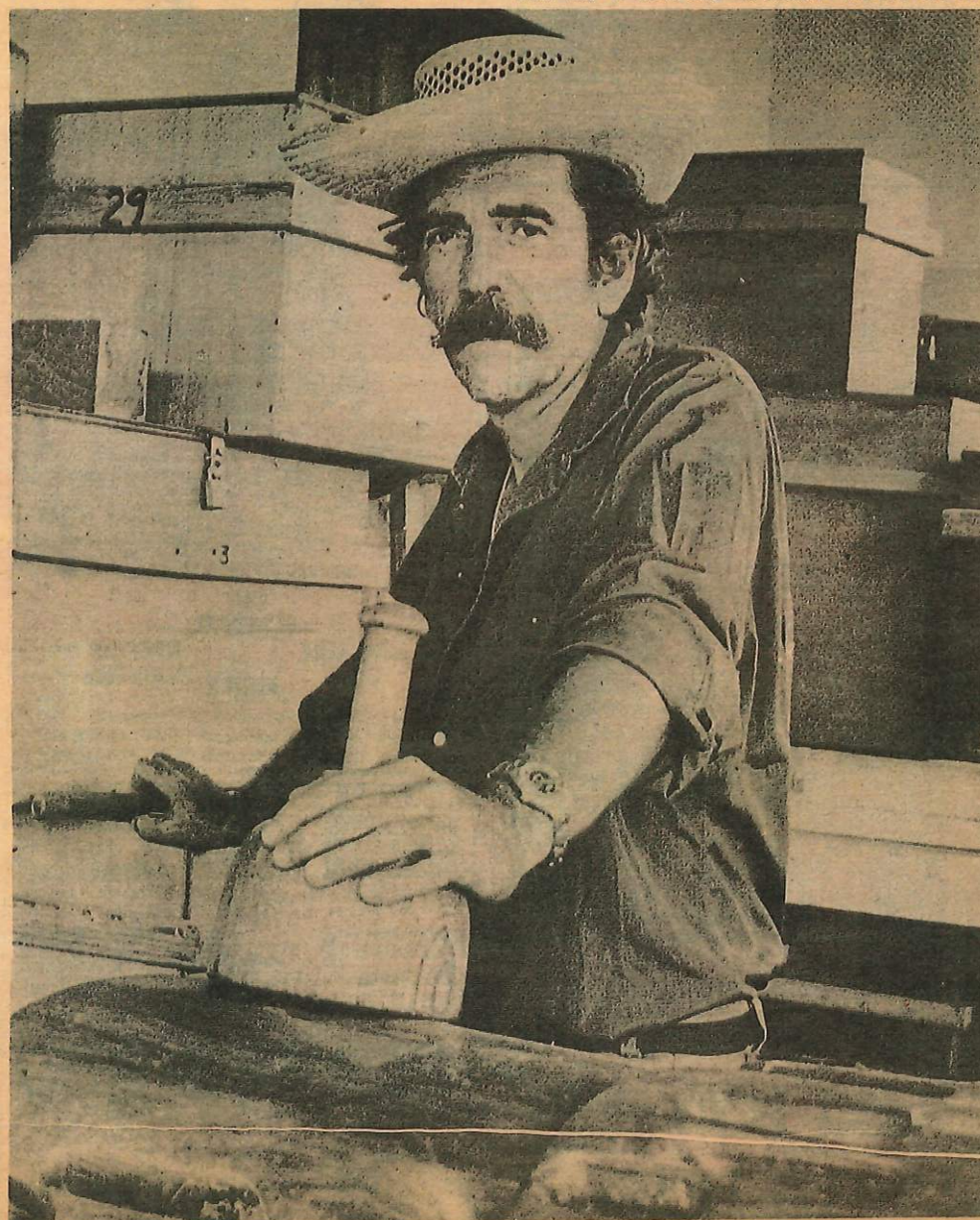
But what gets me is the way they seem to treat invited artists. Every single day during the exhibit both the museum itself and the Venezuelan government paid for separate advertisements on the show, inviting the public to come. And they came. Besides, Dirube was supplied by the Museum with several attending secretaries: one to follow up on relations with the media, another to attend to the exhibit visitors, another to handle sales, and a fourth to pinch-hit.

Besides, I feel envious over how the Caracas museum could handle the Dirube 47-piece exhibit with very well thoughtout lighting and spacing between the pieces, at the same time they were handling a magnificent full-scale retrospective of the works by French modern master Herbin, and another exhibit by Pomodoro, the Italian master. Even if such a vigorous display effort is paid for by petro-dollars, and even if such an effort may be made only "in season," whatever the art

season's length during the year, the sum total of works on display and also the quality speak of sophisticatedly gargantuan and eclectic appetites for art amongst our Venezuelan neighbors.

Invited artists in Puerto Rico get no such splendid treatment. Their hotel rooms may have been paid for at times, but then they have to find out where their shows are and how to get to them. They also wait for the public and for critics or commentators to show up for interviews, but none come because maybe they are out covering fashion shows. Fashion shows get much more coverage in our media than art; I imagine because good photographs with plenty for sex appeal are supplied free by the fashion designers. Chisme appeal is supplied by the politicians. We artists supply self-centered art only, something alien or removed from the public at large.

But the alienation can disappear if the artist has interesting things to say about mankind and his work himself, as Dirube certainly seems to have had for the Venezuelans. He makes good spontaneous copy for the press, as do such other artists as Antonio Martorell, wherever he goes. More self-centered artists who act too seriously as our ambassadors abroad don't get the same reception. Dirube was even invited to teach in Venezuela, and to give seminars.



Artist Rolando Lopez Dirube and two of his wood sculptures.