

ART

'Ex-presion-es' exhibit full of energy, yet quality uneven

Any organization whose goal is to develop and promote the work of Puerto Rican artists in the United States and internationally should be welcomed and helped in achieving success. This is the case with O.P. Art (Organization of Puerto Rican Artists), a non-profit organization of young Puerto Rican artists (from the island and from States) – founded in 1993 and based in New York City – which is dedicated to the development and promotion of Puerto Rican artists in Puerto Rico, the States and abroad.

REVIEW

By Manuel Alvarez Lezama
STAR Art Critic

Last year O.P. Art presented quite an interesting exhibition titled "The New Faces of Puerto Rican Art" at Ateneo Puertorriqueño. Although the quality of the work was very uneven, this exhibition was full



"Icons," by Carlos Aponte.



"En la Mente de Dios," by Abnel Rodríguez.



Untitled by David Alvarez.

of energy and introduced us to some new voices.

Sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture on its 40th anniversary, O.P. Art presents its second show in Puerto Rico this summer. This exhibition, with the provoking title of "Ex-presion-es," is also quite interesting, but unfortunately, again, it is extremely uneven, combining the excellent work of artists such as Luis Carle, Ricardo Ifarraguerri, Eddie Mila and Ricardo Ramírez with pretty amateurish pieces by well-intentioned beginners.

O.P. Art president Luis Carle states in the cata-

logue for this exhibition: "Ex-presion-es" is a representation of feelings and voices from within. Here you will discover diversity of cultures, and different ways to phrase forms, colors and ideas."

I have no problems with – in fact, I welcome – new and different voices or new and different metaphors, but there has to be quality in art. The goal is art – even if you are dripping paint or wrapping buildings in Germany or placing junk on top of trees or burning mattresses or appropriating (plagiarizing?) other artists' work – has to be real excellence. And excellence has nothing to do with luck or

chance. Excellence is the result of exhaustive education, discipline, time, patience, and perseverance. And in art you need more than excellence, you also need to have something to say.

In Puerto Rico, the quality of the art produced by members of the younger generations – the two generations that come after "la Generación del 50" and "la Generación del relevo" – is widely recognized. The work of artists like Arnaldo Roche Rabell, Nick



"Quo Vadis," by Ricardo Ifarraguerri.



"Fashion Beggar" by Ricardo Ramirez.



A detail from "Ojo," by Vanda Santiago.

Quijano, María de Mater O'Neill, Jorge Zeno, Dhara Rivera, Néstor Otero, Aileen Castañeda, María Antonia Ordoñez, Roxana Jordán, Rafi Trelles, Haydee Landing, Nora Rodríguez, Martín García, Anaida Hernández (no name yet for this generation), and now the novísimos - Carlos Rivera Villafañe, Marta Pérez (the younger), Arnaldo Morales, Enoc Pérez, José Jorge Román, Aaron Salabarrías, Eric French, Miguel Trelles, Edra Soto, Gadiel Rivera, Rafael Matos, Felipe Jiménez, Ramón Berríos, Linda Pintor, Guillermo Calzadilla, etc. - is well conceived and well executed, revealing true professionalism and real discipline in their aesthetic and plastic proposals. These artists - and of course, the above mentioned are not the only ones - have something to say and usually know how to say it effectively.

However, many so called artists of today have

nothing to say, and what is worth, they do not even have the tools - education, techniques, patience, discipline, poetry - to effectively communicate anything through their "art." Instead they take refuge in easy kinds of "expressionisms" and ill conceived constructions or installations, trying desperately to conceal their blatant and pathetic laziness and mediocrity.

And do not take me wrong, everyone has the right to refuse in making what they think is art. Furthermore, everyone has the right to be persistent in their mediocrity if they want to - and if they want to they can share it with family and friends. What cannot be tolerated is the bombardment of totally unadulterated trash in galleries, museums and public spaces.

But let us return to "Ex-presion-es." If the goal of this exhibition is to capture and present Puerto Rico's cultural diversity, it is quite a success because the more than 40 artists participating in the show give us a solid view of our perennial and sublime cultural, political, religious and even moral confusion. And let me point out that for me, confusion is not always a negative concept - many times confusion forces us to come up with answers.

The group of artists that constitute O.P. Art at the present moment can be best described as intensely (and even painfully) eclectic. What unites these young artists is their eagerness to share their vision - their experiences, their tragedies, their dreams - with anyone who wants to see more and begin to understand the point of view of some people who live "outside" The Game of Normality.

There is a group of very good pieces in this exhibition - pieces which are of the same quality as the most impressive works of art the public has been seeing in our exhibitions and biennials. The artists who are producing this type of work are in tune with what is going on internationally in the field of visual arts and their work would fit in any respectable collective exhibition in the United States, Latin America or Europe.

Among the best works of art in the show are Carlos Aponte's "Iconos de la cultura popular puertorriqueña y otros estereotipos," a 63-piece serigraphy mosaic that captures part of the constant madness (contradictions, prejudices, superstitions, machismos, ect.) in which we live. Aponte's little anti-poems are quite clever, mixing humor, irony, parody

and subliminal games.

Luis Carle's work, especially "De qué hablan" and "Ass Time Goes By," which play with the male nude in a poetical and metaphysical way, is original and effective. Eddie Milla's interpretations of Christ are also quite impressive. In fact, the artists who presented photographic work - Reyes Meléndez, Marisol Villanueva, Richard Michell, Milie Robles, Leslie Viviene Tung, Leonardo de Vega and, of course, Luis Carle and Eddie Milla - were as a group quite respectable.

Ricardo Ifarraguerri's two political paintings titled "Quo Vados" and "Ecce Homo" (which portray Gov. Rosselló and San Juan Mayor Héctor Luis Acevedo) brilliantly combine the grotesque, post-modern surrealism and political satire. Ricardo Pérez's three paintings, "Disavow," "Limosna" and "Will I Love You?" again reveal this artist's excellent use of color, a poetic sense of composition and an real interest in social themes.

Also of interest were Luis Ferrer's "Santuario de emociones" and "Piexa Solar" - constructions that combine part of the Puerto Rican popular culture, the neon culture, solitude and violence; Willmer Vélez' modern titled "Juan Pedro" - an aluminum, xerox copies and wooden head of Christ composition which reveals imagination and balance in the use of plastic elements; the simple and enigmatic pieces by Pietro Cuevas, especially "Palm 1"; Norah Hernández's painting titled "Mujer en paz"; Samuel García's very well executed folkloric poetry; some of the faces painted by Javier Cintrón; Luis Ferrer's enigmatic (and of course tragic) "Santuario de emociones"; Enrique Rentas' abstract painting; Manuela Aponte's "Yemayá y coral" (of course, without the frightfully ugly frame it now has) and the powerful pieces by Abnell Rodríguez - suggestive and provocative.

O.P. Art is in desperate need of a good curator, and I also think that the number of artists exhibiting in this group should be limited to 20 or 25. A serious and honest process of selection will greatly help O.P. Art. Furthermore, only the best pieces of those selected should be exhibited. This way, when O.P. Art goes to Washington D.C., its exhibit will be stronger, more effective and more representative of the high quality of art being produced in Puerto Rico and its extended geographies. ♦