LOS TAINOS
A Visual Tradition:

An exhibit of modern and pre-columbian images and decorations in contemporary use.

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And while they were eating, they sensed that 'Yaya was returning from his lands. While trying in their haste to hang up the 'gourd, they did not hand it up securely so that it fell to the ground and broke apart. So much water came from that gourd that it covered the whole earth and from it came many fish . . .

Early depiction of Taino with body ornament wearing "naguas".

1 Taino myth on creation. It can also be interpreted as their sea voyage from their homeland to the Antilles.
2 Spirit of Spirits
3 Used by the indians for the storage of food and symbol of the womb of creation.
INTRODUCTION

When Columbus arrived in Boriquén (Puerto Rico) in 1493, he found a culturally advanced society. The Taino Arawak Indians of Puerto Rico had achieved an elaborate ceremonial life and an impressive level of craftsmanship. The consequence of Spanish colonization was the destruction of this society. However, the Tainos left behind designs, symbols and images—an art influenced by their relationship to their environment which speaks to us of their world view. Their designs decorated objects made of wood, ceramic and seashells. The symbols and images incised or painted on stone or on the walls of caves probably recorded special events or were used in religious ceremonies. The meaning of many of these symbols is still unknown, but it is possible that they were the beginning of a symbolic language or an alphabet.

The aesthetic quality of Taino art has influenced the work of many contemporary artists and this exhibition brings together artists who have adapted these designs to a variety of media. Matilde Perez de Sierra, one of the artists participating in this exhibition has devoted a lifetime to the promotion of the image of these designs. For her and other artists like herself the use of these designs has a special meaning. It is not only a recognition of the artistic quality of the designs, but an affirmation of the cultural heritage of Puerto Ricans.

The aboriginals of Puerto Rico have influenced modern Puerto Rican society and in order to better understand the historical development of the Island, we hope to stimulate interest in learning more about them. Some progress has been made by artists, historians and scientists involved in this work, but there is much to be done.

Originally, the focus of this exhibition was the application of these designs, but we found that the work of many artists has also been influenced by other elements in the culture of the Tainos. Contemporary New York artists like Rafael Colón Morales, Marco Dinno, Carlos González, Isabel Nazario and Jorge Soto, all dedicated students of Puerto Rico’s pre-Columbian Indians, created images based on the Taino Indian’s relationship to his environment, his mythology and his religion.

This exhibition is not an anthropological study of the Taino, nor one that pinpoints the cultural elements inherited from them. It is an exploration and celebration of the Taino’s contribution to the cultural heritage of Puerto Rico. We hope you enjoy it.

Gladys Petti
Curator
El Museo del Barrio
March, 1982

17 Bibliografía: escrita por Gladys Petti, Curadora de la Exposición, El Museo del Barrio.
THE TAINO INDIANS FROM PUERTO RICO AND THEIR ART

 Origins

When the Spaniards discovered Borinquen (Puerto Rico) in 1493, they found an Indian population organized into a patriarchal society, devoted to fishing and agriculture. These Indians practiced an animistic religion in perfect harmony with nature. The first group of Tainos, primarily fishermen, came from Florida in North America, followed by another group of cultivators from Venezuela and other South American countries. In time, the two groups combined, and in Hispaniola (Santo Domingo) and Borinquen, created a highly evolved culture which left a rich heritage bequeathing art and craftsmanship of the highest quality. Puerto Rican writer Concha Melendez notes, "The Tainos were outstanding among the sculptors of their cultural zone. They are best known for stone collars, three-pointed monoliths, and El Brunswick stones, which were used during the ceremonial ball games to hit the ball; these objects attest to their great patience and skill in the arts of polishing and decoration. Their beautiful ornamental lines and reliefs in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms have been compared by some anthropologists to Mexican sculptures; that of the Borinquen has simple and elegant lines; it conveys a feeling of repose and harmony between man and nature. Their stone collars, according to the most probable and most poetic interpretation, were symbols of a rhythm from a primitive time when trees were worshipped. The collar was once a curved branch within the magic circle in which the priests universally invoked the spirit they wished to dominate or whose power they wanted to tap. The three-pointed stones, from the most primitive undecorated ones, to those adorned with geometric shapes and marks, reliefs or deformed reptiles and birds, are fertility objects which represent the geminiation of the cactus and the yucca, which were their main foods. Neither codices, nor toles, nor quipus (device for recording facts, commonly used in Peru) were left by the native people of The Ancestors. In the large stones found at the river's edges, and in the monoliths left behind (which anthropologists have discovered in other parts of Latin America), our Indians created fascinating images, to this day undeciphered . . . ."
Puerto Rican craftsmen get support, orientation and technical aid from the Center for Popular Arts of the Puerto Rican Cultural Institute. The Center encourages craftsmen to improve their production and also works with fairs and exhibitions which display artists’ work.

In New York, Carlos Gonzales, Rafael Colon Morales, Marcos Domas, Wanda Quinones and a number of other artists known to you, must be mentioned for their works which include Taino motifs, and images.

**Taino Designs**

In Puerto Rico, there are no indigenous tribes which have continued to produce their arts. And because there is no guide to the interpretation of various tribal symbols and forms, there is a certain fluidity of designs based on these motifs. The conversion of original motifs into designs adaptable for reproduction in ceramics, tiles, textiles, fringes, graphics works, serigraphy and crocheted articles, using techniques appropriate to each medium, can be done in various ways:

- Exact reproduction of the original motif as an entity, or its repetition on an entire surface;

- Combining different motifs without fundamentally changing them, but introducing other elements to complete the composition;

- Varying original designs or creating entirely new ones.

Although there has been some progress in these design conversions, the widespread use of such artistic work in industry—a step which has given other indigenous cultures a stamp of authenticity reflected in economic benefits—has been relatively slow. We hope that activities like El Museo’s exhibit of Taino Applications will bring us nearer to this goal.

Matilde Perez de Silva
El Museo del Barrio
March, 1982

Notes:
2. Dr. Ricardo Alcala, in the introduction to the book of

photonography by Marina W. Schwartz, 1972 (El Museo)

3. The book was published by John Wiley & Co. Publishers (new card, a part of El Museo Institute, Wexner, Inc.)

The designs used in the book were created in Matilde Perez de Silva, and the references were made by Dan Adolfo de Haro. This text was translated into English by Suzy Gonsalez.
MATILDE PEREZ DE SILVA

61 A pillow cross-stitch design in brown and dark red cotton yarn on sand-colored cotton fabric. Center has motif on Taos Stamp.
51 Navajo-pane pillow case in moss green, brown, white and black wool, fringed edges. Motif from a fragment of Taos pottery.
18. Bemba (Frog and Man). The union of men and women symbolized by the cycle of life.

La Canción de la Mujer. Based on the Taino mythology of the creation of the woman by a bird (from Cahoon).

Two color design of Taino symbols. Barrio Condado, Juncos and the Grotto of Urandy, Puerto Rico.
Isha (Ancient Mother) is depicted here as both a horse and dragon. The dragon is a primordial image of chaos from which creation arises, and the horse is a totem figure for humanity. Isha and Opertl-Gualiman form a duality since both deities are cosmic forces. They represent two sides of nature—one goes like the hero, the other stalks him and challenges him with death.
JOSE AVILES

Born in the mountains of Orocovis, Puerto Rico, José Aviles left his country at the age of three for New York, returning home 10 years later to begin his introduction into artastics. During that time he and his family became members of the Artesanos for the Institute of Culture of Puerto Rico.

José specializes in jewelry working with many indigenous materials such as seashell, bone and coral. In the process, he has become an informative source on Taino Indian art and culture. "The history of my ancestors plays an integral part in my artwork," says Aviles, "each time I create, it is an attempt to untangle parts of my past, to understand its meaning and use this knowledge for the benefit of our confused society and the quest for Puerto Rican Identity."

The exhibitions of José Aviles include three mixed media shows; Ritual Images at Galeria Morinivi, the Puerto Rican Festival at Rochester, New York and the Hispanic World’s Fair at the Coliseum in New York. At present he is a member of El Grupo Morinivi and teaches artastics.

RAFAEL COLON MORALES

Painter, lecturer and teacher, Rafael was educated at the San Fernando Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, Spain and received his B.A. from the University of Puerto Rico. He did graduate work at the American University in Washington, D.C. and has lectured and taught at colleges, museums and universities in New York and Puerto Rico. From the year 1974 to 1977 Rafael has worked on a series of paintings dedicated to the themes and narratives of pre-Columbian mythology. His aim has been in actualize myths and imbue them with his personal vision, desires, anxieties and needs. For Rafael, Taino mythology is like a language, a tool for the formulation of thoughts for which there are no concepts available.

He has exhibited extensively in one-man and group shows throughout New York and Puerto Rico, among them: The Museum of the University of Puerto Rico; Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña; Arte y Presencia, Puerto Rico; El Museo del Barrio, New York; Cayman Gallery, New York; Center for Interamerican Relations, New York and Westbeth Gallery, New York.

Presently, Rafael is an artist in residence at "The Clock Tower", Institute for Art and Resources in New York City.

CARLOS GONZALES ORTIZ

Carlos was born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, where he graduated from high school. He continued his education in New York where he acquired the Bachelor of Arts degree at Hunter College and later his Masters of Arts from Buffalo University. He is presently a teacher for the New York City Public School System. He is also a candidate for a Ph.D degree in Anthropology at New York University.

Carlos feels that Taino art was the "symbolic expression of the spiritual experience in a world where the elements of nature predominate." His work is influenced by the Taino "world view" and its expressive and symbolic language. Through his work he wants to "reaffirm and continue to develop this artistic legacy so that our historic cultural values are better understood".

The artist has exhibited extensively in museums and galleries in New York and Puerto Rico, among them: Galeria Oller-Campeche in New York, Galeria Ortino, New York and El Museo del Barrio. He was also part of a group show of Puerto Rican artists that toured major cities in Germany.

WANDA MARIA QUINONES

Wanda, born in New York City, has an extensive background in creative crafts for senior citizens. Recently, through a Chas Neighborhood Grant, she was able to develop the "Older Artist Training Seminars" in crafts, at the East Harlem Music School. She majored in Apparel Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology and completed her training in 1969. Later, she attended the Albany State University and enrolled in a "study-abroad" program that allowed her to study in Puerto Rico and Mexico. In 1977, she received a B.A. in Humanities Studies from Adelphi University.

Ms. Quinones works in resist-printing on fabric and paper and experiments in batik. She explores the "Indigenismo" theme by giving new life and meaning to the images that were left behind by her caribbean ancestors. Her work received recognition through a feature article in "Caribe" Magazine in 1978. One of her design adaptations of a Taino motif is used as the T.V. logo for the ongoing NBC series, "Visiones". She coordinated a women's exhibit entitled "Comadres" at El Museo del Barrio in 1980. Wanda also organized "Hidden Treasures", a senior citizens crafts exhibit at El Taller Boricua. Currently she is a Recreational Director for the Department of the Aging of the City of New York.
MATILDE PEREZ DE SILVA

When she was a student back in the 30's, an inspiring lecture by Adelfo de Huesas at the University of Puerto Rico launched Matilde Perez de Silva on what was to be her life's work: promoting the use of Taino motifs in contemporary crafts and works of art. In 1919, she and Huesas collaborated on the authoritative book "Indigenous Designs of Puerto Rico". Since then Matilde has further studied art and traveled widely in Latin America and Europe searching for museums with Taino collections. She has become one of our most knowledgeable sources on the subject of Taino art and deserves much credit for helping to preserve this native art to the stature it deserves.

Matilde is a member of the board of the Ponce de Leon Federal Savings Association and devotes much of her time to volunteer work.

JORGE SOTO SANCHEZ

Jorge, painter and sculptor, was born and raised in New York. He has extensively researched the pre-Columbian Indians of Puerto Rico and many of his images are based on Taino mythology. Jorge feels, "Taino art expresses a respect for nature and everything she gave birth to." He adds that "Man" understood his relationship with the universe and was at peace with himself."

From 1973 to 1981 Jorge was the Artistic Director of El Taller Boricua and presently is the Dean of El Museo del Barrio's Art School. He has exhibited extensively in galleries and art institutions in New York, Puerto Rico and abroad. His list of exhibits include: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico; Museo de La Universidad de Puerto Rico; El Museo del Barrio; the Brooklyn Museum and the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Nitza is a ceramicist, printmaker, painter and muralist. She was born in Mexico and raised in Puerto Rico. The artist studied at the San Carlos Academy, the University of Mexico, and the Art Students League.

Her murals beautifully communicate in the Lower East Side, and the Bronx. Through these murals Nitza shares her art and heritage with the public. Her interest in the pre-Columbian Indian is reflected in her creations of Taino mythological portraits and uses cut and drawn paper and stencils to transform Taino symbols into lively and colorful figures.

In 1978 the artist was chosen to participate in the Cultural Council Foundation's "Artist Project" and in 1980 was awarded the "Visual Arts Fellowship" by the National Endowment for the Arts.

She has exhibited at the Cinque Gallery, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Staten Island Heritage House, Studio Museum in Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, Cayman Gallery, Puerto Rican Center for the Arts, and Soho 20. She also participated in the 6th Bi nnal de Grabados Latinoamericano in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
LISTING
OF WORKS

The works are arranged alphabetically by artist. Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width, preceding depth.

José Avilés

Indian Craft

1 Cerezo Ring—made from the corozo nut. 1981
2 Guereño—Gold disc used as a body ornament by the Taíno Indians. 21 1/2 x Diameter.
3 Cenjí—three seated Taíno idol used in deity worship. 31 1/4 x 18 x 18. 1981

Luis Cancel

Rubblings from petroglyphs in Puerto Rico.

4 Mayor de Cagüana, Centro Ceremonial de los índios. Barrio Cagüana, Caguas, 16 1/2 x 16. 1978
5 Courtois of María Torres

Marco Díaz

Rubblings from petroglyphs in Puerto Rico.

6 Centro Ceremonial de los índios, Barrio Cagüana, Caguas, 16 1/2 x 16. 1978
7 Cueva de Monte Grande, Cabo Rojo. 19 1/2 x 15. 1974
8 Cueva del Indio, Arroche. 14 x 14. 1974
9 La Piedra Escrita, Barrio Cobre, Jayuya. 35 1/2 x 25. 1974
10 Guereño de Monte Grande, Cabo Rojo. 42 x 30 1/2. 1974
11 La Piedra Escrita, Barrio Cobre, Jayuya. 35 1/2 x 25. 1974
12 Centro Ceremonial de los indios, Barrio Cagüana, Caguas, 37 1/2 x 25. 1974
13 Centro Ceremonial de los indios, Barrio Cagüana, Caguas, 37 1/2 x 25. 1974
14 La Cueva del Indio, Arroche. 48 x 28. 1974
15 La Piedra Escrita, Barrio Cobre, Jayuya. 36 x 25 1/2. 1974
16 La Cueva del Indio, Arroche. 36 x 25 1/2. 1974
17 Centro Ceremonial de los indios, Barrio Cagüana, Caguas, 24 1/2 x 20. 1974
18 Barnaco 19 x 18. 1978
19 Riega de Transición 23 1/4 x 23 1/4. 1978
20 El Ciclo Solar Taino 33 in Diameter.
21 El Mundo Taino 46 x 40. 1978
22 Naturaleza 34 x 28. 1980
23 Auyero Sagrado 31 1/4 x 27. 1980
24 Las Alas de la Vida 30 x 25. 1978
25 Identidad II 18 x 12. 1980
26 Rafael Colón-Morales

Acrylic on Canvas

27 Opal—to Guabanim 57 x 42. 1976
28 Denisus Canabo-Jordana (Hanging skin—media arco). 40 x 50. 1976
29 Denison y su Hermano 36 x 30. 1976
30 Hula 57 x 42. 1977
31 Cayman on Paper 40 x 50. 1980
32 Wanda Maria Quiñones Barik

Wall sculptures

33 Barnaco 19 x 18. 1978
34 Baile del Maridago 17 x 12. 1977
35 Naturaleza Ovulado Taino 17 x 12. 1977
36 Untied Wall Hanging (Permanent Collection El Museo del Barrio)

37 Untied (Design by Matilde de Silva) 8 x 4. 1981
38 Coqui—Marmosa 6 x 6. 1981

Arylic on Canvas

39 Untied (Creating Card) 8 1/2 x 5 3/4. 1976
40 Untied (Creating Card) 8 x 5. 1976
41 Hidden Treasures (Painted by Gilberto Hernández) 24 x 17 1/2. 1980
42 Series of Tauino images taken from Barrio Cobre, Jayuya and the caves of Utuado, Puerto Rico. 1981
43 Jorge Soo Sanchez

Drawing Ink on Paper

44 La Creación de la Vida 20 x 30. 1977
45 Untied—Multi color wall hanging of Taino Symbols. 15 x 13. 1978

Silkscreen

46 Two color designs of Taino symbols. 29 x 14. 1972

Design adaptation by Matilde Perez de Silva

Needlepoint

47 Wool on beige canvas—design in yellow, green and brown. 22 x 10. 1981
49 Cross stitch design of a designs in white on beige canvas 18 x 13 1/4. 1981
50 Repeat pattern—in red, yellow and black wool on beige canvas. 21 1/4 x 16. 1981
51 Repeat pattern—plain pearl thread over red cotton fabric. 25 x 18. 1981
52 Needlepoint pillow case in green, white, brown and black with fringed edgings. 12 x 17. 1981
54 Design in green, yellow and brown wool on white cotton fabric. 17 x 12 1/2. 1981
55 Wall hanging with needlepoint design in green, blue, red and yellow wool. 37 x 37. 1981

Panel with cross stitch designs in red, black and green wool on musk cloth. 22 1/4 x 19 1/2. 1981
56 Embroidered repeat pattern in brown, green, yellow and red wool on beige raw silk fabric. 54 x 45. 1981
57 Cross stitch design in moss green and white on salmon color cotton fabric. 22 x 16. 1981
58 Pillow case with cross stitch design in green, yellow and brown wool on beige cotton fabric. 14 x 12. 1981
59 Cross stitch design in red, blue, brown and black batik on natural color cotton fabric. 60 x 50 1/2. 1940
(Made by Zulma Acosta Victor)
61 A pillow cross stitch design in brown and dark red cotton fabric. 20 x 20. 1981

Graphics

62 Embroidered circular design

All the above courtes of Marco Díaz.

Carlos Gonzales-Oritz

Barik

Barik

21 Alehese Vire 22 x 31 1/2. 1977
22 El Baile del Coqui 17 x 12. 1977
23 Imagines Ovulado Series I & II 22 x 13. 1978
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