



TO:  
BRIDGE  
BETWEEN  
ISLANDS

AIR MAIL

FIRST CLASS  
AIR MAIL

OLGA ALBIZU

Untitled, oil on canvas, 36 x 42, 1976

cover design: gilberto leonardes  
canalop design: light is on me  
photography: maderh, effeeta  
typography: scarlett letters

# **BRIDGE BETWEEN ISLANDS**

**Retrospective Works by Six Puerto Rican Artists in New York**

**Henry Street Settlement**

**Louis Abrons Arts for Living Center**

**November 3rd to December 1st, 1978**

**The Bronx Museum of the Arts**

**January 6th to February 18th, 1979**

**El Museo Del Barrio**

**February 27th to April 1st, 1979**



## BRIDGE BETWEEN ISLANDS

### Retrospective Works by Six Puerto Rican Artists in New York

These works are by Puerto Rican artists, but they are not about Puerto Rico. They are no more about Puerto Rico than they are about New York. They are personal visions of lives lived, products of interior images juxtaposed by exterior landscapes and transformed—through lives devoted to craftsmanship—into art.

Every so often paintings and sculpture get together. They are hung on walls and put on pedestals and they call us to see them. They demand a dialogue. Without the dialogue they remain shadows. By our reply, by looking at them, we acknowledge the vision they incorporate; the bridge between the artist and the viewer is established.

This exhibition talks about still another bridge: the bridge between the two islands—Puerto Rico and Manhattan—that have shaped, by their very distinct and demanding presence, the visions of these six artists.

Three of the artists left Puerto Rico at a young age, (Eloy Blanco, Marcos Dimas and Tony Bechara), one came to New York after having already established a reputation in the art world (Olga Albizu), two of the artists (Jorge Soto and Evelyn Lopez de Guzman) were born in New York and saw their native island at first only within the eyes of their parents (although all three have visited Puerto Rico as teens or adults on several occasions). We can see the demanding presence of one island over the other in a continually evolving fluidity, changing from artist to artist and fluctuating within each artist's life.

All six artists feel a strong identity with Puerto Rico in an ethnic and cultural sense, but only one of them, Jorge Soto, feels that his art per se is distinctly Puerto Rican. Their styles are as varied as the artists that influenced them, they studied with, or that inspired them; they

Renata Karlin,  
Visual Arts Director  
Henry Street Settlement

Luis R. Cancel,  
Director  
Bronx Museum of the Arts

Jack Agueros  
Director  
El Museo Del Barrio

include names such as Frank Stella, Esteban Vicente, Max Beckman, Robert Rauschenberg, William Bazotes, Hans Hofman, Salvador Dali, and Chuck Close.

All of the artists in the exhibition feel that New York has profoundly influenced them. Some of them acknowledge the influence of the various art movements of New York, all of them feel affected by the City's cultural life both in the visual and performing arts, and all of them feel that the "cool", "hard-driving", "fast", "hard-edge" quality of city life has affected their perception. At the same time all of them come back to acknowledging their Puerto Rican identity and heritage. When asked what aspect of their work they could identify as Puerto Rican, all of them agreed that it is their use of color and light that is distinctly Latin.

For those among the artist whose works deal with geometric and/or abstract forms (Olga Albizu, Evelyn Lopez de Guzman, Tony Bechara) the influence of the island of Puerto Rico seems to end here. The work of the other three artists, however, contains recurring, semi-representational images, such as the "stick-figures" of Eloy Blanco, and in the cases of Marcos Dimas and Jorge Soto, the source of their imagery is acknowledged to be Puerto Rican or more precisely Afro-Latin-American.

Each of the artists has thus bridged the two islands in their unique and personal way. Their craftsmanship, the strength of their vision, their tenacity, have transformed this bridge into art. We invite you, the viewer, to enter into a dialogue with their work and thus cross the bridge that unites the artist with the spectator and completes the vision.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT PAGE

The participating institutions would like to express their appreciation to Ms. Petra Barreras of the Department of Community Programs, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her expertise in editing the biographical materials and writing the individual artists' biographies for the catalog helped make it a valuable resource tool for other researchers in Puerto Rican Art History.

We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to each of the participating artists for their patience and help during the long hours of interviews, preparation, and selection.

All of the photographs in the catalogue were taken by Marbeth who worked on this project, courtesy of the Cultural Council Foundation CETA Artists Project.

And finally, many thanks to Zi Pinsley for her advice towards the catalogue's design.

This exhibition was made possible with grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, The New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the cooperation of the Cultural Council Foundation CETA Artists Project, and the Cultural Voucher Program of Museums Collaborative, Inc.

COVER DESIGN: GILBERTO HERNANDEZ  
CATALOG DESIGN: LIGHTSOURCE  
PHOTOGRAPHY: MARBETH, CFCETA  
TYPOGRAPHY: SCARLETT LETTERS

Olga Albizu began her artistic training with Esteban Vicente in Puerto Rico around 1944. Vicente, who subsequently became a well known abstract expressionist painter in New York, was then married to the writer Maria Teresa Babin, whose works explored the problems of the cultural identity of the Puerto Ricans. Albizu became close friends with Vicente and his wife. When they moved to New York, Albizu followed. She continued to work under Vicente's direction for some time. In 1948 she obtained a graduate scholarship from the University of Puerto Rico to further her studies of painting at the studio of Hans Hofman.

Already at so early a stage in Albizu's career it was evident the direction which she was going to pursue. Since then, her development has been straightforward, always working within the realm of abstraction. Later on she enrolled in the Arts Students League where she worked with Morris Kantor, Halty and Vitlacil. In 1951 and 1952, respectively she studied at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris and at the Academy of Fine Arts, in Florence.

Albizu's stay in Paris and Florence introduced her to some of the best collections of European painting. To this moment Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) is one of her favorite painters. That seems only natural, for Goya was one of the first to explore the possibilities of texture in painting. Of the more modern masters, Albizu recognizes Nicolas de Stael as a source of inspiration. Again, de Stael represents another important moment in the development of texture painting.

Albizu returned to New York and established her studio here. She traveled frequently to Europe and Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico Albizu has her closest relatives. Although she stays mainly in Ponce, where her family resides, she has managed to keep in contact with the serious galleries in San Juan which continue to sell her works. Her paintings

# OLGA ALBIZU





can also be found in the three major museums in the island: Ferre Museum, Ponce; Museum of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras; Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueno, San Juan. Despite the fact that her artistic career has developed outside the island, Olga Albizu is a well known painter in Puerto Rico.

In New York, Albizu works on her own, uninterested in the so called New York art scene. She visits museums frequently, galleries, not so often. Her primary passion is music. In the sixties she became actively involved in supporting jazz musicians by designing jackets for their albums. She is also interested in classical music, one reason why she lives near Lincoln Center. In the last ten years Albizu's work has been remarkably consistent. Very consciously, almost meticulously, she has been experimenting with larger canvasses. Her color scheme is broader, the masses of paint freer. She prefers to work during the winter time when the oil paint dries not as quickly and allows her to scrape off and work with the palette while the paint is still wet.

Commenting about success in New York's art world, Albizu presented the following idea: "A man does not enter priesthood to become Pope, but because he feels the religious vocation. A painter becomes a painter because he feels the urge to paint, not to become a famous artist." That thought should throw some light on Olga Albizu's dedication to her art.



**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1924

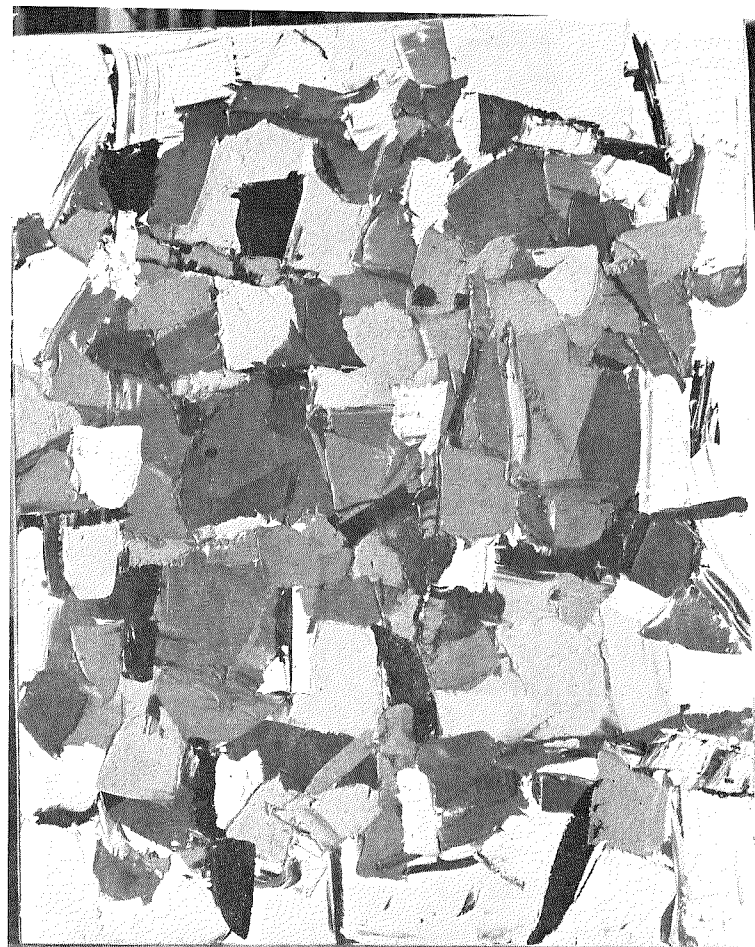
**EXHIBITIONS:**

**GROUP SHOWS:**

New York City Center, 1956  
Riverside Museum, New York, 1957, 1959, 1960  
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena, 1957, 1962  
Stable Gallery, New York, 1957  
First Annual Bienal Interamericana, Mexico City, 1958  
Nonagon Gallery, 1960  
Casa del Arte, San Juan, 1962, 1963  
Metropolitan Museum, New York City, Art Heritage of PR, 1973

**ONE MAN SHOWS:**

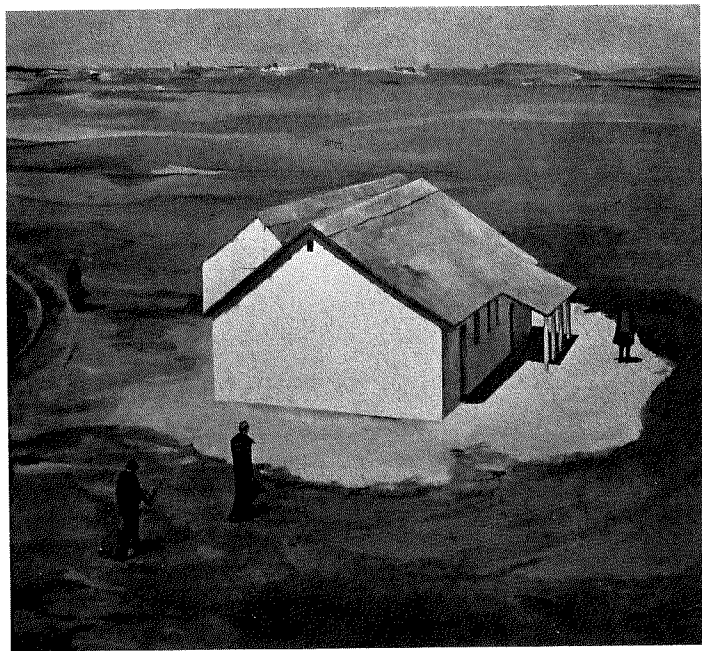
Panoras Gallery, 1956  
Pan American Union, Washington, D.C., 1960  
Ateneio Puertorriqueno, San Juan, 1957, 1958, 1961  
Roland de Aenlle Gallery, New York, 1959, 1960  
Galeria Santiago, San Juan, 1969-1976  
Swearingen-Byck Gallery, Louisville, Ky., 1971



Untitled, oil on canvas, 30 x 51,  
1973

Untitled, oil on canvas, 24 x 30,  
1973

# TONY BECHARA



**Landscape with Figures**, oil on  
canvas, 48 x 48  
1969 collection of Mr. Lee W. Davis

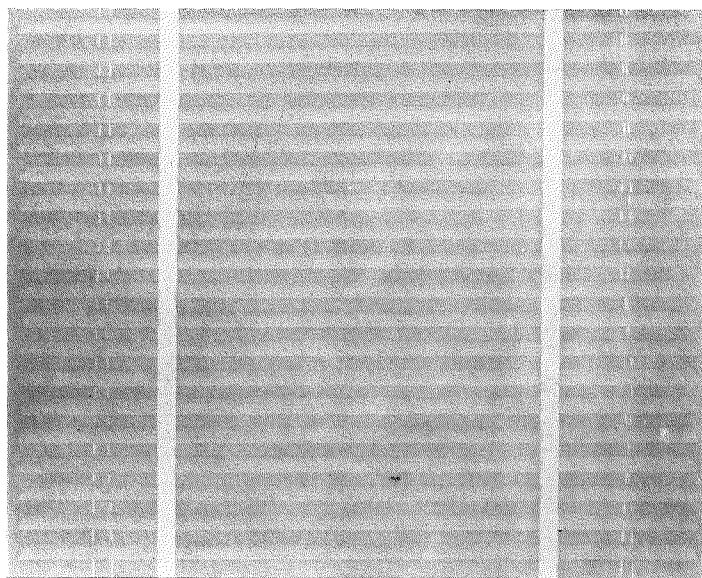
Tony Bechara, born in Puerto Rico in 1942, came to Washington, D.C. in his late teens to study law. After completion of a B.A. degree at Georgetown University, Bechara felt uncertain about his future plans and decided to travel for a while. He arrived in Paris where he stayed for about a year studying at the Sorbonne and taking advantage of the rich cultural life of that city, especially of its many art museums and galleries. It was then that he became interested in the visual arts, specifically painting. At the Louvre Bechara recognized Francisco Oller (1883-1917) as a Puerto Rican painter. (Oller is one of a handful of artists of the Americas whose works hang permanently in the Louvre.)

During his year in Europe, Bechara also travelled to the south of Spain where he was fascinated by the endless varieties of tiles and mosaics: Islamic, Roman and Moorish. One of the few art facsimiles that Bechara keeps in his studio is a reproduction of a Byzantine mosaic.

In the early sixties Bechara returned to the U.S.A., this time to New York where he has resided ever since. For a few years Bechara kept working, isolated, struggling with the feeling that he should not have pursued painting because he had not been "born a painter."

It was not until 1968 that he enrolled in a formal school of art, the School of Visual Arts. There he stayed for two years until 1970. If nothing else, the school was Bechara's first real exposure to contemporary American paintings. Some of his teachers then, now form part of the history of American painting in the '60's: Richard Serra, Joseph Raphael.

The realistic portrait from those years reveals a figurative style that gradually disappears in his later paintings. The portrait is very self-conscious, a painting within a painting. Bechara admits that during those years he was struggling to find his own vocabulary. He was at that



**Venetian Blinds**, oil on canvas, 45 x 37 1971 collection of Dr. and Mrs. Allan Frosch

time influenced by more expressionistic styles like those of the Mexicans Orozco, Riviera, Siqueiros; and of the Europeans Soutine and Modigliani.

In the late 60's, Bechara did some imaginary landscapes in grayish tones which ruled out any possibility of experiments with color, a preoccupation that becomes increasingly important in his later works. Interestingly enough, the strip of unpainted canvas that frames *Landscape with Figures* reappears in his most recent paintings.

The *Venetian Blind* series, still in a monochromatic palette, represents a definite move into non-representational painting. From here on (1971), Bechara's works have tended toward abstraction, sometimes producing overall patterns that can be "read" as very stylized floral or geometric designs.

One of Bechara's preoccupations is color. He states clearly: "I have decided that I do not want to see solid colors anymore." His concept of color in painting seems to relate most closely to that of the Pointillists. It also relates to Optic Art but the dynamism of the designs and the subtle gradations of color are very characteristically Bechara's.

"Controlled Chaos" is a phrase that describes the final product of Bechara's work. He explains: "I try to allow for accidents which I consider breakthroughs, not by splashing and watching the drips, but by working within the controlled and rigid nature of my work. I work blind, most of the paint I have applied is covered by tape, and there is where the accident can happen." Bechara also describes New York as a "Controlled Chaos." The city has definitely affected his perception as an artist. It confronted him with an international aesthetic language which in turn helped him discover his own vocabulary. New York has also made him aware of the problems of the cultural expatriate. The Melting Pot seems to allow easier access to the art scene for certain cultural groups over others. "Although most of the time I function unaware of it, sometimes it seems to be just a little bit harder for us





(Puerto Ricans). I feel it is harder, but I hate to admit it even to myself."

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Puerto Rico, 1942

**EXHIBITIONS:**

**GROUP SHOWS:**

"Ten Puerto Rican Artists", Brooklyn Museum, 1970

"Puerto Rican Artists", New York State Council for the Arts, 1972

"Eight Latin Americans", Loeb Center, New York University, 1973

Forum Gallery, New York City, 1974

Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975

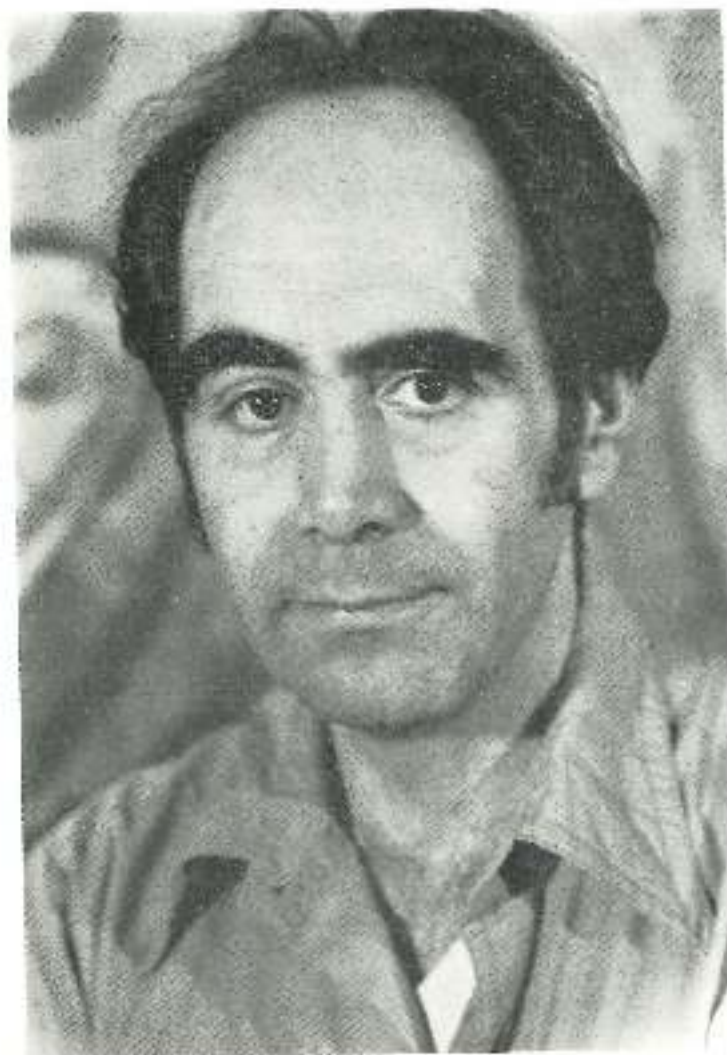
Magnet: New York, Center for Inter-American Relations, 1976

Latins in New York, Ponce Museum, Puerto Rico, 1977

Harlem Art Collection, New York City, 1977

Resurgimiento, El Museo del Barrio, New York City, 1978





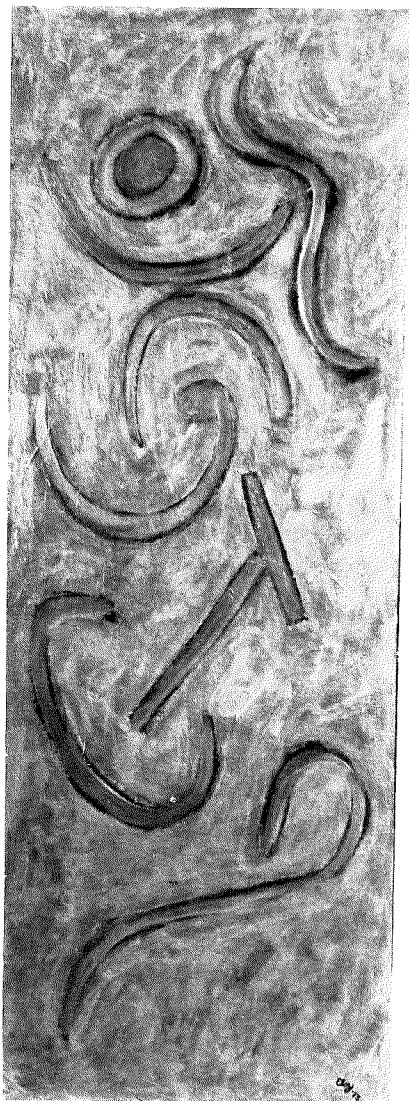
## ELOY BLANCO

Born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico in 1933, Eloy Blanco came to New York City with his parents and grandmother at the age of five. Like many of his other compatriots, Blanco suffered the consequences of the abrupt linguistic change. During childhood and adolescence he experienced problems in articulating the sounds of both Spanish and English. Blanco underwent special treatment for speech problems and as a part of these therapeutic exercises he was encouraged to draw. It is not a matter of coincidence that Blanco refers to his stylistic variations as "different phrases" of a broad "vocabulary". At times, Blanco has seen himself as communicating in the manner of a cave man, that is, tracing symbols that someone would decipher someday.

Although first his drawings were simply an alternate form of expression, very soon their artistic value became evident as well. In 1948 Blanco won a scholarship to attend the Brooklyn Museum Art School where he studied until 1953. In 1949 Blanco had his first one-man show at the Brooklyn Museum School Gallery. This was bound to be one of the most encouraging moments of his artistic life. Not only was it a high honor to exhibit individually at so early an age, but it was also especially inspiring to receive the compliments of two of the art school teachers: Max Beckman and William Bazotes.

Aaron's Rod, oil on acrylic on  
canvas

71 x 25 1/2, 1972



Beckman, the expressionist painter, had been appointed at the Brooklyn Museum Art School in 1949. His death in December of 1950 did not allow time for Blanco to establish a meaningful relationship with the German master. A more enduring influence however, turned out to be William Baziotas. He developed in Blanco an interest toward experimentation with texture. To this day Blanco recognizes that "the great thrill I get from painting is not the color, is not the composition either. It is a certain love for the paint itself."

Thanks to the encouragement that he received while attending the Brooklyn Museum Art School, Blanco continued to paint against the strong opposition of his parents who, worried about his future, wanted him to learn a trade.

In his teens Blanco got acquainted with the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. At first he was very impressed with Picasso's "Girl Before a Mirror." The basic ovate shapes of that painting might have inspired the embryo-like form in Blanco's *Poor Soul* of 1959. The stylization of his "stick" figures (reminiscent of prehistoric cave pictographs) was not too far from Klee's or Giacometti's representations of the human body. Blanco's series of "stick" figures on red and green is a whimsical variation of Optic Art.

He succeeds in creating optical effects but avoiding the pure geometric designs that are the trademark of that style.

Blanco's titles always suggest another level of communication besides the purely visual. *Aaron's Rod*, *Constantine's Dream*, *Eternal Search* suggest religious preoccupations.

Beyond the literal meaning of biblical stories and metaphor, more universal meanings emerge out of Blanco's paintings as they do out of parables. It is in that realm that Blanco establishes communication with the spectator beyond literal spelled-out phrases.





PLACE OF BIRTH: Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, 1933

EXHIBITIONS:

GROUP SHOWS:

Brooklyn Museum, 1949-50-51-52 and 1953

Brooklyn College, 1951

Brooklyn Library, 1955

Windy Glass Gallery, 1963

Actors Gallery, 1964

Rand's Gallery, Canada, 1964

Sea View Gallery, South Hampton, 1974-75 and 1976

El Museo del Barrio, 1978

ONE-MAN SHOWS:

Brooklyn Museum School Gallery, 1949

Brooklyn Museum School Gallery, 1950

East Side Project, 1961

Dom Gallery, 1965

St. Marks Gallery, 1966

Cayman Gallery, 1976

PRIZES:

Max Beckman Award

*Dream of Constantine*, oil on  
canvas, 36 x 28, 1969

*Eternal Search*, oil and acrylic on  
canvas

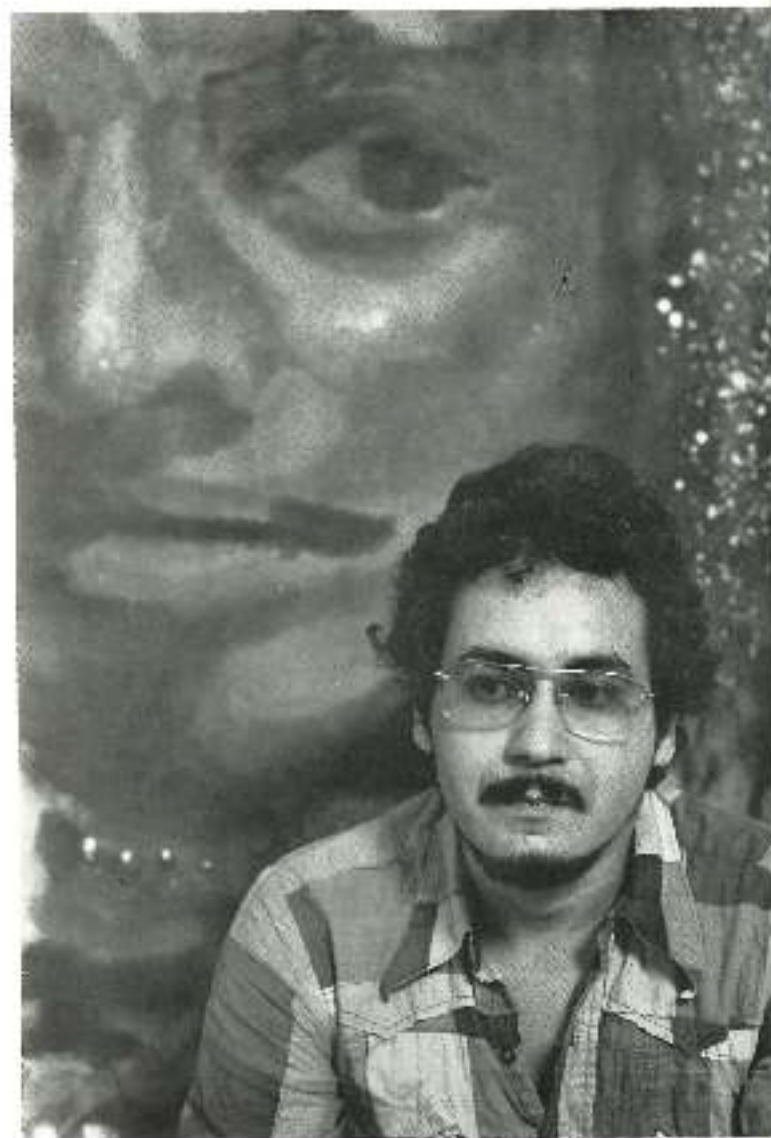
45 x 53, 1976-78

# MARCOS DIMAS

Sugar cane workers are seasonal workers. During *tiempo muerto* (off-season) many of them look for jobs elsewhere; Marcos Dimas' father (who helped weigh and ship cane) came with his family to New York during one of those off-seasons. Having lived in the natural environment of Puerto Rico's country-side left a deep impression on Dimas. Although he has visited the island as an adult, his experiences from early childhood seem to be the most vivid. He also recalls having handled Taino Indian artifacts that were collected by a relative of his. Dimas admits readily the influence of those early experiences in some of his works.

Although Dimas had been interested in art since childhood, it was not until after his release from the military service that he began to paint. In 1967, taking advantage of the veterans benefits, Dimas registered in the School of Visual Arts from which he graduated in 1970.

At the School of Visual Arts he came in contact with artists such as Chuck Close and Malcolm Morley, among others. *Domestic Utensils* and *Amputation* reflect some of the preoccupations of American painting in the sixties. Common objects—the scissors, the can-opener—are depicted in a super-realistic style and highlighted against a solid color background. The way in which they are depicted is doubly disturbing. Not only are these objects, which generally are taken for granted, presented oversize, but they are also placed in unexpected circumstances. The scissors are cut into pieces; the can openers are scratching an ambiguous surface. Dimas explains: "the scissors and the





can openers . . . these manual tools are in essence objects of sophistication in the linkage from man to machine . . . they are a step into modernism. . . ." By not performing their functions, these tools become unknown, dangerous, surreal objects. The cool, hard-edge quality that Dimas finds in New York's landscape seems to permeate these paintings too.

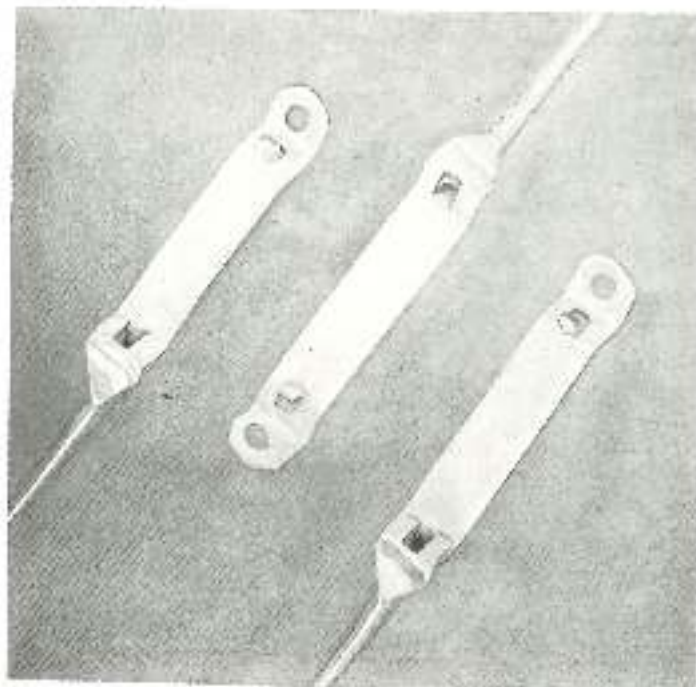
After leaving the School of Visual Arts, Dimas went through a period of "going back to the roots." During that period he studied the Taino Indian art heritage which he had encountered as a child in Puerto Rico. He also became very much aware of the African component of the Puerto Rican culture.

*Pariash* represents, in a larger than life-size scale, an Afro-Indian personage, an archetypal figure of the third world. This painting was once called *Obatala* after a divinity of Santería—the Afro-Anrillian syncretic religion; his style evolved into a more spontaneous application of paint and a less tight drawing as well.

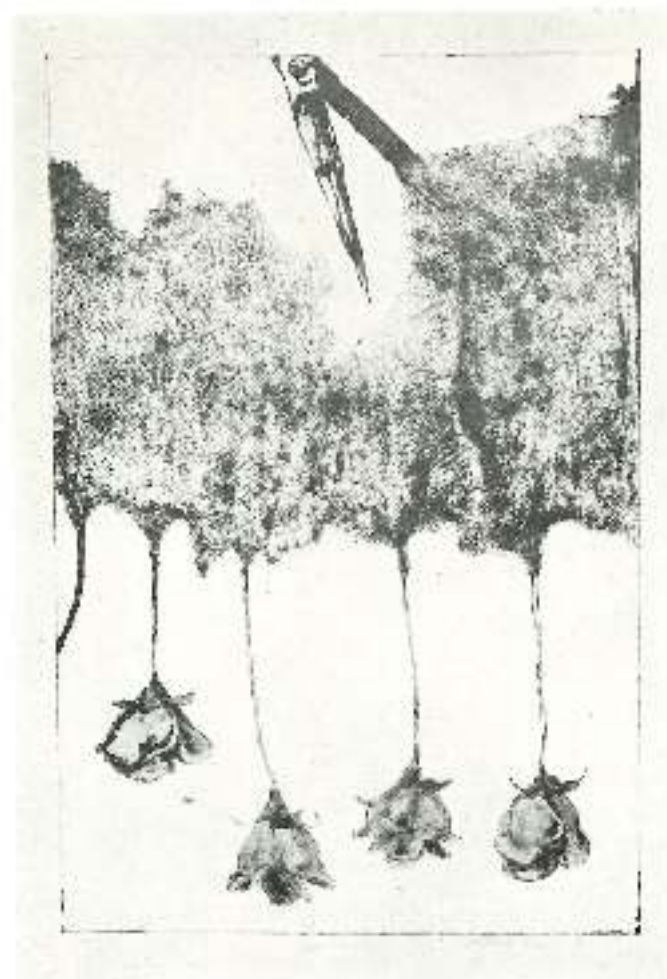
His conscious rejection of the themes and styles of mainstream art was not only an aesthetic choice but a political decision as well. During the early seventies Dimas was actively involved in attempts to decentralize art collections and make them more available to people. He actively participated in the takeovers of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of the City of New York. Those were momentous gestures which effected some short-term, as well as long-term, changes in the museums' structures.

As an offshoot of those years of cultural-political awareness Dimas founded a collective workshop, *El Taller Boricua*, with a group of Puerto Rican artists. *El Taller* has always been engaged in promoting Puerto Rican culture and offering free art instructions to the youngsters from the immediate community of *El Barrio*. *El Taller* in that sense has been a political organization, although it has never been affiliated with

Domestic Utensils, oil on canvas,  
45 x 44, 1970



Four Hand-Colored Roses,  
Erbograph, 18 x 29, 1969



any political group.

Dimas' later works continued to explore primary symbols; sometimes in a straightforward manner, as in *Opiyel Guaribani*, sometimes in more abstract, almost esoteric fashion. Dimas says, "This series of paintings is an attempt to deal with and master-mind primitive sophistication. The primitive mind tends toward synthesis rather than analysis. Where we see confusion, primitive man sees fusion."

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, 1943

**EXHIBITIONS:**

**GROUP SHOWS:**

Galeria Tico, NYC, 1977

Soho-Whitney Counterweight, NYC, 1977

Brooklyn Museum "Nani", NYC, 1976

Cayman Gallery "Spirit of Independence", NYC, 1976

Center for Inter-American Relations—"Iman"

Exhibit traveled to Institute of Culture and Ponce Museum, Puerto Rico, 1976

Boricua University, NYC, 1975

Fortune Gallery—"Latin America Printmakers", NYC, 1975

Fortune Gallery, NYC, 1974

Marlow Fine Arts Gallery, NYC, 1973

Hunter College East Festival of Third World Arts, NYC, 1973

El Museo del Barrio, NYC, 1973

Cinque Gallery, NYC, 1973

Automatium House, NYC, 1971

Taller Boricua, NYC, 1971

Institute of Culture, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1970

Loeb Student Center, NY University, 1969

Galeria Hoy, NYC, 1969

Brooklyn Museum, NYC, 1969

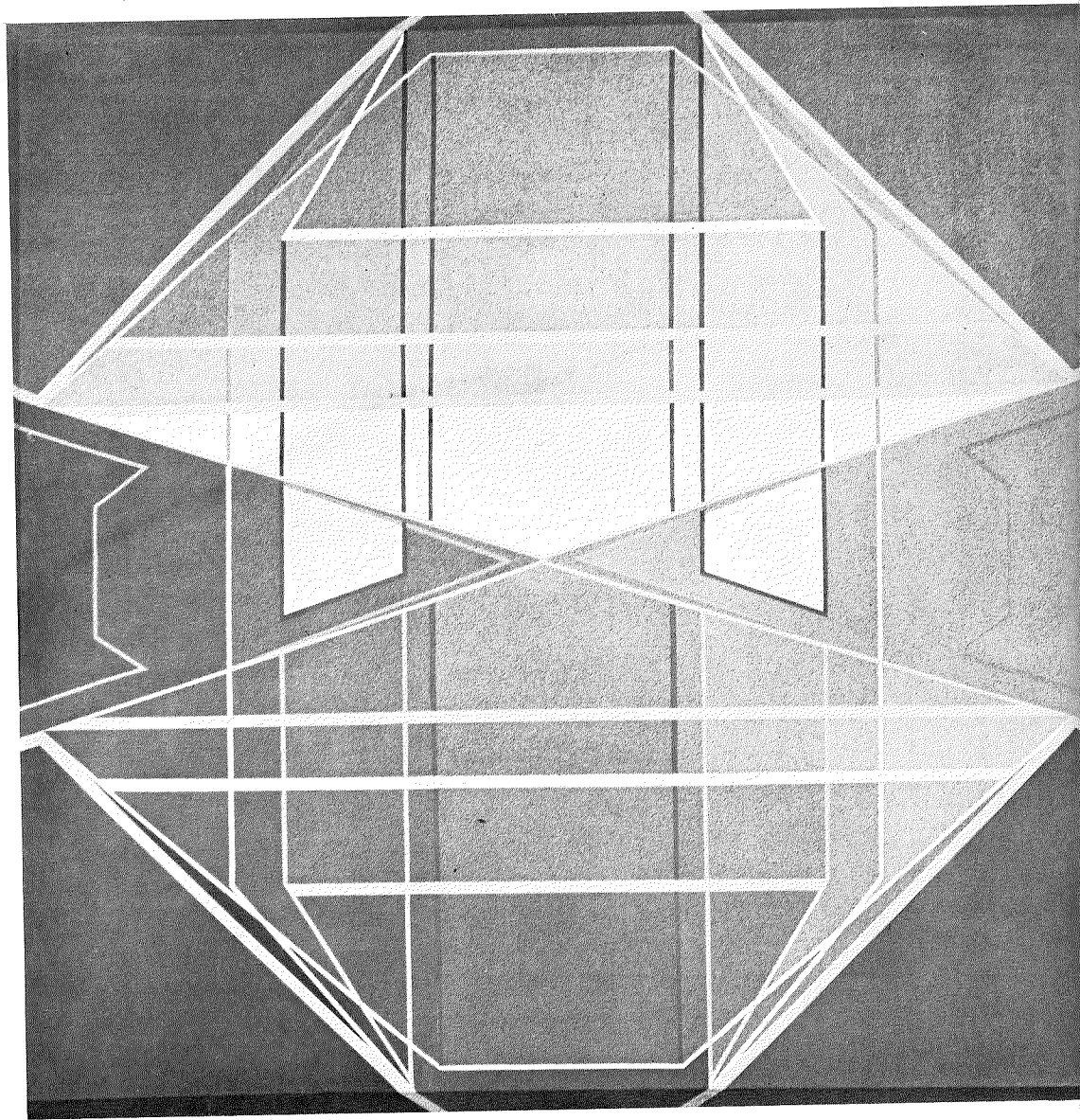
School of Visual Arts, NYC, 1969



Pariah, oil on canvas, 54 x 65,  
1974



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 66,  
1972



Evelyn Lopez de Guzman has been very fortunate. Since early childhood her artistic talent has been recognized and encouraged by those who surround her. Her parents, husband, friends, and relatives have supported her decision to become an artist. In elementary school she received a lot of encouragement which led her to enter Washington Irving High School where the curriculum emphasized the arts. From there she went directly to Hunter College, where in 1974 she completed graduate studies in Fine Arts.

It was actually during her years at Hunter that Lopez de Guzman finally decided to work on painting. Prior to that she had been interested in interior decoration and graphic arts. Even nowadays she feels that her method of work, her meticulousness are inherited from her early training in the graphic arts.

Lopez de Guzman admits that at first she did not feel comfortable with painting, especially with color. While her interior decorating and her graphics showed vibrant colors, her painting exhibited "muted, lifeless" colors. She explains: "It was fear of experimentation. One day I decided not to do a four-sided painting, but to go into the circle. For some reason I started painting bright colors." Ralph Humphrey, her painting instructor at the time, encouraged her to further experiment with bright colors, bold contrasts.

Although Lopez de Guzman strives for soft, fluid forms she cannot allow paint to "just drip or flow on the canvas." She begins with a simple line drawing. Her ideas are usually inspired by forms that she notices while walking around the city; "... it could be a nicely shaped window or a gate." That is only the beginning, for when she gets to the canvas the real problems emerge. Most of the time the final product has very little to do with that first sketch. It is the interaction of colors that determines the final details of a specific design.

## EVELYN LOPEZ de GUZMAN





Some of Lopez de Guzman's designs are reminiscent of pre-Columbian textiles. At one point in her studies, she became very much interested in South American Indian patterns. Although she has never consciously tried to recreate them, she recognized their influence on a general level.

Another preoccupation of Lopez de Guzman is to achieve balance of forms without being perfectly symmetrical. She is working on balancing out similar, yet different forms and equivalent colors. Her dislike of repetitive designs multiplies her work but she is willing to accept the challenge.

Lopez de Guzman's latest works are more subtle and softer in color, the forms are more stylized. She is experimenting with the illusion of depth which was lacking from her previous paintings. She is also experimenting with new materials: wood, plexiglass.

Evelyn Lopez de Guzman has been endowed with many gifts. She has a beautiful daughter, an understanding husband, artistic talent, and a profession. She has only one problem, she wants to succeed in every task she undertakes, to set an example for other Latin women. So far she has been very fortunate.

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** New York City, 1947

**EXHIBITIONS:**

**GROUP SHOWS:**

New York City Graduate Center, 1970

Puerto Rican Cultural Art Exhibition, New York University Loeb Center,  
New York City, 1971

International Art Exhibition, New York University Loeb Center, New York  
City, 1972

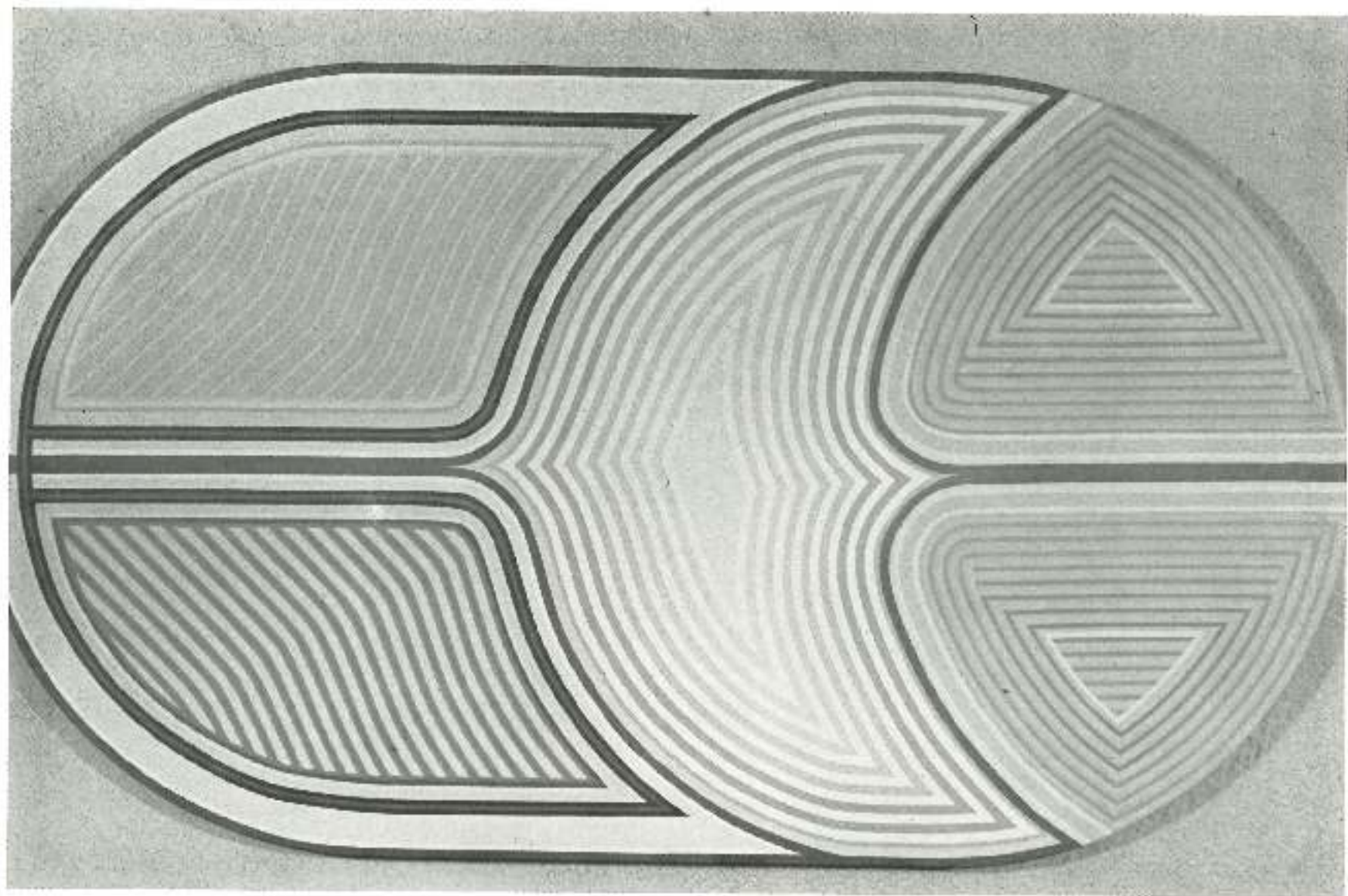
International Art Exhibition, New York University Loeb Center, New York  
City, 1975

No Ho Gallery, New York City, 1975  
Bergdorf Goodman (Shal-Aide Society),  
White Plains, New York, 1976  
Cayman Gallery, New York City, 1976  
No Ho Gallery, New York City, 1976  
No Ho For the Arts, *23 Artists at 10 Studios*,  
New York City, 1977  
El Museo Del Barrio, *Resurgimiento*, 1978,  
New York City, 1978

**ONE-MAN SHOWS:**

Hunter Arts Gallery, Hunter College,  
New York City, 1974  
Cayman Gallery, New York City, 1976  
No Ho Gallery, New York City, 1976  
No Ho Gallery, New York City, 1977

**Untitled**, acrylic on shaped canvas,  
72 x 41½, 1974



# JORGE SOTO

Jorge Soto was born in New York City. Nevertheless, his early childhood was almost identical to that of any working class child in an urban environment in Puerto Rico. Language, food, music, religious beliefs, family traditions, crowded spaces, community life, and poverty were then, and still are experienced in a similar way by Puerto Ricans living in both New York City and the Island.

School was Soto's first real encounter with the Anglo-American cultural environment and for him, as for many other Hispanic children, this first encounter was difficult. He was intimidated by the language and teachers of the new city and he had to attend special classes designed to "remediate language problems."

Very soon, Soto learned to ignore the teacher; he fantasized and scribbled most of the time. Contradictory as it may seem, the same teachers who intimidated him were the ones to encourage the development of his talent. In third and fifth grades Soto was awarded the Sak's scholarship to study anatomy, drawing and composition. Since that time, he has been consistently working on developing his skills as a draftsman and painter.

For Jorge Soto, primarily a self-educated individual, the city provided what art schools ordinarily provide for other artists, that is, a general knowledge of artistic trends and a basic exposure to materials, media and techniques. As an adolescent—more so nowadays—Soto frequently visited the major museums in the city. He became familiar with images and styles of the most diverse periods and countries. The wealth of these art collections, the profusion of art galleries and



publications, the abundance of visual images, the sophistication of the mass media and the agitated cultural life of the city have always excited Soto's creativity.

But for a working-class Puerto Rican, the New York art world sometimes seemed to be far removed from his immediate reality. For some years as a young adult, he took whatever jobs were available for an unskilled worker. Painting during those years became extremely difficult. Nonetheless, *Christ of the Christians* of 1967 begins to show some of his basic preoccupations and stylistic features. The rendition is bordering on Primitivism: a very tight drawing, pure colors, and a small format. The religious theme of this painting, however, is treated in an unconventional manner. Christ is depicted as if skinned, the genitals clearly visible. This figure foreshadows the hundreds of representations of human beings produced by Soto in subsequent years. *Cristo* also touches on two themes that continuously reappear in many of his works. One of them being religious iconography, and mythology in general. These themes are evident in *Ay Bendito!*, which explores Catholic iconography, and *Chango* which relates to Afro-Antillian Santería.

The other theme that appears in *Cristo* is human suffering and pain. Soto explains: "Basically the main images in my work deal with MAN, human beings, distorted bodies, twisted faces, and tortured souls. You and I being victims of this so-called democratic society we live in. My images offer no escape but a repulsive mirror we refuse to look into because it is too painful and disturbing." *Window of Pain* explores some of these preoccupations as well as Soto's use of discarded materials and found objects. His interest in these materials is very personal. It developed very early in his childhood. "One of my first physical scars, on the left part of my head . . . and another scar, on my right thumb, are related to empty lots in El Barrio . . . they became my play-



Window of Pain, acrylic on wood,  
44 x 48, 1973





grounds." Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Chamberlain reinforced Soto's desire to utilize those discarded objects which are very much part of everyday life in New York City.

In 1971 Jorge Soto walked into El Taller Boricua, a collective studio-workshop of Puerto Rican artists, becoming a member. Two things convinced him to join: the powerful Puerto Rican graphics on the walls and a familiar face: that of Marcos Dimas, one of El Taller's founding members whom Soto had met while growing up in the same block at Fox Street in the South Bronx. "Cuando yo entré al Taller realicé la conexión con un pasado y una tradición con la que podía identificarme."

One of Soto's first interests was Puerto Rico's Columbian artistic heritage. The Taino Indian mythology and art objects inspired many of his drawings. The diversity of fertility images in the Taino cultural production reinforced Soto's interest in the theme of the life-circle—Procreation, Woman, Earth. *Two Prostitutes and a Young Man* is one of many variations on the theme of motherhood, of Woman as a Fertility Goddess.

Lately, Soto has found in Jose Campeche (1751-1809; the first Puerto Rican painter of great repute) another source of inspiration. Soto's painting *Second Version of Campeche* is one of several versions based on Campeche's *Don Miguel Antonio de Ustariz*. Campeche's portrait of the Spanish governor embodies the image of power. Its formal components are very effective. Soto retains those and reinterprets their meaning.

Soto studies Puerto Rican art as seriously as he explores galleries in Soho. He travels frequently to Puerto Rico where he exhibits regularly. He feels there is a strong cultural, political and economic bond that ties the Puerto Rican population on the islands of Manhattan and Puerto

*Ay Bendito*, acrylic on canvas, 42 x 50, 1973





Second Version of Campeche,  
acrylic on canvas, 38 x 50, 1978

Rico.

Jorge Soto's art and life are committed; his art is never decorative. He states: "In order to justify my existence to myself, I strongly feel that I do not create art for amusement or to fit into a trend, or to be sold as a commodity."

NAME: JORGE SOTO

PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City, 1947

EXHIBITIONS:

GROUP SHOWS:

Latin American Art Gallery, New York City, 1975

Brooklyn Museum, New York City, 1976

Museo de Ponce, P.R., 1976

Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, PR, 1976

Cayman Gallery, Soho, NYC, 1975-78:

1. Black Caribbean Art
2. Soho-Whitney Counterweight
3. Spirit of Independence

Latin American Artists Living in New York Center for Inter American Relations, NYC

El Museo del Barrio, NYC, 1971-78:

1. Expresion del Alma—Confrontacion (Ambiente, Espacio)
2. Grafica Puertorriqueña
3. Homenaje a Nuestros Pintores
4. Celebracion de Aniversario
5. La Historia del Barrio
6. Resurgimiento

ONE-MAN SHOWS:

Galeria Moriviv, NYC

Association of Hispanic Arts, NYC, 1977

Galeria Tito, New York City, 1976

Galeria Latinoamericana, Instituto Mexicano

Cubano de Relaciones Culturales, Guadalajara, Mexico,

1975

Society of Friends of Puerto Rico, Inc., New York City,

1975

Museo de la Universidad de Puerto Rico UPR, Rio Piedras,  
Puerto Rico, 1974

Galeria Tamara, Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 1973

Taller Galeria Boricua, New York City, 1971



## CHECKLIST

### OLGA ALBIZU

Untitled, oil on canvas, 58 x 66, 1970

Untitled, oil on canvas, 30 x 51, 1973

Untitled, oil on canvas, 40 x 40, 1975

Untitled, oil on canvas, 40 x 42, 1972

Untitled, oil on canvas, 36 x 36, 1965

Untitled, oil on canvas, 36 x 40, 1976

Untitled, oil on canvas, 24 x 30, 1973

### TONY BECHARA

Woman in Red Hat, oil on canvas, 24 x 36, 1967

Landscape with Figures, oil on canvas, 48 x 48, 1969—collection  
of Mr. Lee W. Davis

Venetian Blinds, oil on canvas, 45 x 37, 1971—collection of Dr.  
& Mrs. Allen Frosch

Tyger, Tyger, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 74, 1976

Untitled, acrylic on paper 15 x 18, 1978

Untitled, masking tape on canvas, 18 x 24, 1978

Untitled, masking tape on canvas, 18 x 24, 1978

ELOY  
BLANCO

- Poor Soul, oil on canvas, 16 x 12, 1959  
Golden Message, oil on canvas, 16 x 20, 1966  
Symbols in the Milkyway, oil on canvas, 36 x 28, 1963  
Dream of Constantine, oil on canvas, 36 x 28, 1969  
Subway Rush Hour, oil on canvas, 42½ x 48½, 1970-72  
Aaron's Rod, oil and acrylic on canvas, 71 x 25½, 1972  
Eternal Search, oil and acrylic on canvas, 55 x 53, 1976-78  
The Fall, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 38, 1978  
Double Red, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 38, 1978  
Butterfly Hunt, oil and acrylic on canvas, 29 x 29½, 1973

MARCOS  
DIMAS

- Four Hand-Colored Roses, Lithograph, 18 x 29, 1969  
Opiyel Guaribon, ink on paper, 33 x 24, 1975  
Amputation, oil on canvas, 48 x 48, 1969  
Domestic Utensils, oil on canvas, 45 x 44, 1970  
Pariah, oil on canvas, 54 x 65, 1974  
Spiritually True, oil on canvas, 54 x 54, 1975

EVELYN  
LOPEZ

DE GUZMAN    Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 66, 1972  
                  Untitled, acrylic on shaped canvas, 72 x 41½, 1974  
                  Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 98 x 33½, 1974  
                  Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 50, 1974  
                  Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48, 1976  
                  Untitled, acrylic on shaped canvas, 82½ x 70½, 1976

JORGE  
SOTO

Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48, 1978

Christ of the Christians, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24, 1967  
Two Prostitutes and a Young Man, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60,  
1972  
Second Version of Campeche, acrylic on canvas, 38 x 50, 1978  
Chango, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24, 1973  
Ay Bandito, acrylic on canvas, 42 x 50, 1973  
Window of Pain, acrylic on wood, 44 x 48, 1973