The Voyager

November 6, 1981 – February 5, 1982

El Museo del Barrio
1230 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10029
Born in Puerto Rico, Marcos Dimas migrated with his family to the United States before his tenth birthday. He remembers growing up in the largest of the South Bronx barrio tenement ghettos, places where we have gathered in our poverty since we left Puerto Rico by the thousands during the Great Depression and after, places where the Puerto Rican underclass, as we are called by sociologists when we are not middle class, still live, waiting for the American Dream to become a reality. Whatever we’re called, we’re still, over a half century later, amongst the most exploited and disfranchised in the brutality of the economic competition of American culture.

Marcos recalls how, as a child in Puerto Rico, he would uncover Taino artifacts in the fields where he played, artifacts like those of the original Taino, Arawak Indian inhabitants of Puerto Rico, which he observed in his uncle’s collection. Through the years, the mythic and surreally mysterious Taino objects have periodically appeared in his dreams.

As an artist Marcos has found himself impelled to realize the mythic culture, the surreal mystery of those objects from his childhood, as a necessary part of his art. He finds his art as he found artifacts as a child, by playfully digging below the surface of his consciousness.

I myself have an easier time understanding art and resolving the contradictions in art if I view it as a behavior, a special application of processes found in our everyday mental, physical and spiritual behavior.

I perceive art in all our cultural behavior in the symbolic consecrations of our everyday activities, what we call reality, and in the consecrations of our fantasies and dreams. What is very special about the artistic behavior of Marcos Dimas and other artists like him is his consciousness of the importance of art as a process of authentication.

Marcos understands art as a behavior that affirms our deepest processes of being as well as our cultural roots. He understands that those of us who have given ourselves to—or have more or less been overwhelmed by—the American melting pot culture, have, to that extent, lost touch with and been alienated from our culture roots.

Marcos seeks to release himself from the spuriousness of the European American aesthetic, an aesthetic which demands that the culturally familiar, imagery, real, surreal, or abstract, results in art which is often a hodge-podge of purposeless experiment, a freefall of self expression. He reveals in his work a profound desire to reconnect with his deeper culture soul being, to reconnect with the authenticating emblematic consecrations of his root culture. Marcos therefore makes his art a...
process of liberation, freeing his being to the nurturing flow of his Puerto Rican, pre-Hispanic
collective unconscious.

I sense in Marcos Díaz's work a striving for a form of what I have come to call the
ethno-aesthetic, the state in which I see art releasing itself from the false categories given by art
historians who speak of art as primitive, classical, modern, contemporary or avant garde. It is
simplistic to say that Marcos' art works bring together elements and techniques of the European and
American symbolists, expressionists and surrealists. Nor is the core aesthetic of his work explained by
stating that he utilizes the found object that there is an element of Juda in his work. As I see it, it is
the ethno-aesthetic realized in Marcos Díaz's work that clarifies what historians simplistically call
primitive art is, in fact, the classical art of the ancient cultures of Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the
Caribbean. Clearly what art historians call classical art is in fact neo-modern, a refinement of the
modernism of the world's ancient cultures. Western, so-called Modern, art is, therefore, a replay of all
that took place in what the West confusingly calls primitive art, making the so-called modern
European and European American art neo-classical.

Through his art, Varcos helps us to understand that primitive art is a misnomer, a colonial
culture's bigoted concept. Art is a behavior and it is information—mental, physical, spiritual and
cultural—and is more appropriately explained and revealed in research that explains and reveals the
processes of the mind, the body, the spirit and culture.

The art historian and the art critic have been a disappointment. They have compromised the
classicism, modernism, impressionism, expressionism, surrealism and avant-gardism of the ancient
cultures of the world. It is the classicism of the ancient culture of Puerto Rico that inspires Marcos
Díaz. It is his translation of that which makes his art contemporary in the most authentic sense.

There are questions raised and answers given by every artist, questions about aesthetics, the form and content of art and the spuriousness and authenticity of culture. Marcos
Díaz asks the questions many of us of the Hispanic/Puerto Rican artistic community have asked, a
question whose answer those of us pursuing the ethno-aesthetic agree with. As a Puerto Rican artist,
what does modern and contemporary European and European American art, its cultural ethnic
meanings, its aesthetic form and content, offer me?

Clearly, the answer hinges on whether or not these European and European American modern
and contemporary aesthetics and art are in fact aesthetics and art unique to the history of art. On this
planet. And of course the answer is, they are not, yet they have been presented as unique so often
that we can only assume it is malicious in intent. (Certainly this occurs more out of a cultural
chauvinism than a naive or ignorance of the art. History of the planet.) Anthropologists and
archaeologists reveal every day how all of the aesthetics and art of the so-called Western cultures are,
in fact, deeply rooted in the so-called non-Western cultures, and that all cultures are rooted in their
unique histories of cultural conglomeration. The pre-Western and non-Western cultures, the root
cultures of the Americas—and the Hispanic/Puerto Rican culture—have developed and evolved over
hundreds of thousands of years all of the so-called art inventions of the Western world. These
inventions have been claimed and called by the Western world surrealism, abstraction, realism,
impressionism, expressionism, cubism, performance art and earth works, to mention a few.

Marcos knows our ancestors did it, he knows they did it all and he seeks a communion with them
as he seeks to recapture their ritual, affirming their process in his art. But what of the nonbelievers,
those that say, so what, why can't art just be art. why can't we just do what we want to do without all
this concern for what it might mean?

My answer is, it depends on your purpose, if your purpose is to be purposeless, okay. But if our
art, the soul center cultural process of our being, is to authentically affirm and dignify all we are and
can be, it must certainly affirm and dignify our authentic cultural artistic roots.

Every Hispanic and Puerto Rican community needs artists, who, like Marcos Díaz, defend and
evolve its authentic root culture, artists who authentically serve the contemporary renaissance of the
Hispanic/Puerto Rican culture. Every Hispanic community needs its Taller Boricua, its Museo del
Barrio, to nurture its artists, to share their revelations with both the smaller community and the larger
world culture.

The present and the future of the minority cultures, as we are called in America, minorities which
are in fact the cultural majorities of the world, depend on it.

Rafael Montañez Ortiz
Professor of Art. Puluerga University
16. Trapped in a Dream, 1978
10. The Chair and the Zag, 1981
5. The Guardian, 1978
15. Ritual Drum, 1975
6. Noche en Yucuyú y La Luna Coquerando, 1978
4. Opiyel Guraurobo, 1975
1. La Media Luna, 1974
3. The Calderón in the Closset, 1975
12. Passing Time, 1976
19. Vanity Table, 1974
21. Chair, 1978
In 1969, as a result of the Brooklyn Museum's Contemporary Puerto Rican Artist Exhibit, a group of artists, like myself, including Adrian Garcia, Armando Soto, Tony Bechara, Martin Rubio, Hector Alvarez and others came together for the first time. This led to the formation of a Puerto Rican artists group which later joined the Art Workers Coalition. During this period, one of my first sculptures was "Vanity Table," a psycho-abstract work influenced by the times, soft on the outside, menacing on the inside, a turbulent character beneath a warm exterior.

As a group we were concerned with the lack of art and cultural programs for blacks and Hispanics. We felt it was important to decentralize existing art and cultural institutions. Our purpose was to encourage and support new artists, to create art consistent with our cultural aesthetics, and to bring our art to the community.

During this same period I met Rafael Ortiz, also a member of the Art Workers Coalition, and the first director of El Museo del Barrio. Our group was joined by Puerto Rican artists from the Island, Carlos Osoirio and Rafael Tufiño and there occurred an exchange of ideas and philosophies.

I rejected the New York art scene, museums and galleries and cleansed myself of all formal art education and preconceived perceptions about art. I abandoned traditional tools, experimented with formal and compositions while striving for a new language in my work which would reflect my cultural and political history. My objective was to reach a state of raw creativity and to accomplish my own visual language. By 1974, this period of rebirth, gave way to works like "Faniah," "Time Past," and "Half Moon." I was influenced by the Taino culture and my work became a spiritual voyage into the past.

During the late 1970s, having established a primal identity, I continued to work with the essence of the primitive concept and created a series of paintings and drawings of ritual assemblages. One of the first of these drawings was "Opyiel Guaurioban" which was influenced by a Taino dog deity.

Today, I continue to make aesthetic choices based on my cultural and political awareness. Recent works like the "Voyager," "Tribute to Tito" and "Spirit Trap" are sculptures constructed from modern materials, but these sculptures are also a manifestation of a primitive vision, tempered by the contemporary Puerto Rican urban experience.

Marcos Dimas
November 1981
MARCOS DIVAS/SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

BORN: Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico

STUDIED: School of Visual Arts and W.N.E.T. Film and Television School

AWARDS: CAPS, 1977 (Filmmaking)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1979 Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.
Association of Hispanic Arts, N.Y.C.

1978 Taller Boricua, N.Y.C.

1976 El Museo de Barrio, N.Y.C.

1975 Musco Del Barrio, N.Y.C.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

1981 Hispanic Artists in New York, City Gallery, N.Y.C.

1980 Taller Boricua at Rutgers University, N.J.

1978 Events, The New Museum, N.Y.C.

1976 House of the University Museum

1975 Artists 79, United Nations Building, N.Y.C.

1974 Private Icon, The Bronx Museum, N.Y.C.

1973 Bridge Between Islands, El Museo de Barrio, N.Y.C.

1972 The Bronx Museum, N.Y.C.

1971 Soho, Whitney Counterweight, Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.

1970 N.A.A. The Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.C.

1969 Spirit of Independence, Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.

1968 Center for Inter American Relations, N.Y.C.

1967 Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, P.R.

1966 Museo de Arte de Ponce, P.R.

1965 Latin American Printmakers, Forum's Gallery, N.Y.C.

1964 Paintings and Assemblages, Forum's Gallery, N.Y.C.

1963 First Festival of Third World Arts, Hunter College, N.Y.C.

1962 Cinque Gallery, N.Y.C.

Automation House, N.Y.C.

1960 Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, N.Y.C.

1959 Contemporary Puerto Rican Artists, The Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.C.
LIST OF WORK

PAINTINGS, OIL ON CANVAS

1. La Media Luna, 1974, 52" x 54"
2. Tiempo Pasado, 1975, 54" x 50"
3. The Calderón in the Closet, 1975, 54" x 50"
4. Space in Time, 1976, 54" x 46"
5. The Guardian, 1978, 54" x 48"
6. Noche en Yukuyu y La Luna Coquetiendo, 1979, 54" x 48"
7. El Sonique, 1980, 58" x 48"
8. Evening Chant, 1980, 38" x 30"
9. 2 Umbrellas, 2 Umbrella and a Belt, 1990, 38" x 30"
10. The Chair and the Zigg, 1981, 38" x 30"
11. The Vanity, 1981, 38" x 30"

DRAWINGS, INK ON PAPER

12. Passing Time, 1975, 35½" x 24"
13. Ritual Assemblages, 1975, 35" x 24"
14. Guayt Gauiroban, 1975, 35" x 24"
15. Ritual Drum, 1975, 35½" x 24"
16. Trapped in a Dream, 1978, 35½" x 24"
17. Three Elephants, 1978, 35½" x 24"

ASSEMBLAGES, MIXED MEDIA

18. Spirit Trap, 1974, 24" x 16" x 60"
19. Vanity Table, 1974, 9" x 28" x 54"
20. Tribute to Tito, 1975, 36" x 8" x 26"
21. Chair, 1978, 18" x 10" x 36"
22. Table and Lamp, 1980, 20" x 14" x 51"
23. Dec, 1981, 60" x 31" x 72"
24. Untitled Wall Piece I, 1981, 14" x 14"
25. Doctoral Piece, 1981, 7" x 16"
26. Panorama, 1981, 48" x 15"
27. Hanging Mirror, 1981, 18" x 16"
28. The Voyager, 1981, 38" x 38" x 96"
29. A Rose Among Thorns, 1981, 6" x 12"