ELOY BLANCO
"Faces and Figures"
A RETROSPECTIVE
East Wing
EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO
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INTRODUCTION

Patricia Wilson-Cryer

In 1938 at age five, Eloy Blanco moved to New York City from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, with his parents and grandmother. The transition was a complicated one for Blanco, who, from an early age, suffered with a speech problem.

From a very early age, Blanco recalls a fantasy world which he depicted in hundreds upon hundreds of drawings. His teacher, Dr. Elliot Shapiro, a speech therapist took note of what was being generated and became very interested in Blanco. Through Dr. Shapiro's constant and unfailing encouragement Blanco gradually began to learn to talk.

When Blanco was fourteen, Dr. Carl Fenichel, the director of The League School, helped him obtain a scholarship to the Brooklyn Museum School of Art, where he was to remain for five years.

During that time, the school was in its heyday, boasting numerous renowned artists on the faculty. Blanco became acquainted with Max Beckman the year before his death, and later studied under William Baziotes, the American abstract expressionist. The young artist received a great deal of attention and encouragement while at the Brooklyn Museum. He had a one-man show in the school gallery when he was only fifteen from which he received media coverage from several local newspapers. Thus, considered somewhat of a prodigy and an artist with a future, Blanco concentrated even more on developing his art as he hoped to make a break-through in the New York art world. He had no other academic training, nor had he developed a skill which could be applied to a trade, and therefore in order to support his art he entered the work force as an unskilled laborer, taking odd jobs and working in sweat shops, each time believing it would be a temporary situation.

Blanco has always painted with a great deal of energy, often working on five or six paintings at the same time. He is a prolific painter, and his studio is crowded with shelves and shelves of paintings. He has experimented with many different styles and techniques, and because of the enormous quantity of work, many examples have been omitted from his exhibition.

In spite of the quantity, Blanco is always conscious of trying to be honest to his moods and feelings of the moment. Through his paintings, he claims, "I found myself a thousand times." Variety in style is important to him as he believes that without artistic growth and development comes death. He is excited by the very nature of paint with the variety of textures, colors, and manner it can achieve. "Accidents" become assets in the organic growth of his paintings.

It was in 1976 when he had a one-man exhibition at Cayman Gallery that Blanco first came in contact with other Puerto Rican artists. Until that time he was not only unaware of their existence, but also unconscious of the richness of his own Puerto Rican heritage.

"First I'm an individual, and then an artist...After a while I just can't escape the fact that I am a Puerto..."
MAN INSIDE SILENCE

Papo Colo

When an artist works everyday for many years, his production is more than a discipline—it is an obsession. For Eloy Blanco, painting is an obsession. In this exhibition, although we see only a small portion of his work, both in quantity of output and in the large vocabulary of his images, it is enough to understand the consistency of attitude that runs throughout the construction of his use of varied imagery. During a career that spans thirty-five years, the artist has dedicated his compulsive energy to realize his creative force with expressive strokes, from his lyrical portraits of the fifties to the humorous accumulation of the little signal people of his more recent work.

Blanco constructs his images from a series of devastating strokes that can form a figure or a mask. A build-up of these strokes results in a monolith of populated canvases that are at once deceptively simple and complicated. Throughout his career, this mixing of images is a kind of eclectic declaration and advice as to what the artist should represent—freedom. For it is the artist's attitude toward painting, toward the construction of the images with his stroke, that is the real subject of the work.

The expressive approach of Blanco's early works leads first to a direct resolution of the figure through portraits and nudes; isolated subjects that evoke lyrical fantasies of the memory, sometimes humorously, as in "Nude with a Candle", to the territory of masks and cave figures, where the message is directly communicated through clear, elementary strokes.

It is the search for a basic form to express the human body that leads Blanco to the use of the most simple of forms—the stick figures—in order to create a complex structure of meaning and composition. In these paintings, what the artist calls "Hombre de Palo", works flat with the transparencies accomplished by the stroke markings, the artist retreats from the figure in order to recapture the symbol of the figure, a mirage of signals that is more than the figure. In these works, one primary color in the background is covered by another primary color of stick figures. This overall patterning of moveable groups of calligraphic multiples assume a kind of expressive dance between form and color, a rhythmic coexistence of dynamics.

From the posed, solitary female nudes of his early work, Blanco reduces the gestures of the stroke to capture the essentials of the later paintings. During this period he begins to simplify the images and the construction of the work by using fewer more clear strokes in order to enable the viewer to see the action, as in "The Battle of the Dragon" and "St. George".

With these works, he not only introduces religious legends into his thoughts, he transmutes the organic texture and the so-called primitive look alike drawings into religious icons. In every person is a primal vitality. Some of these paintings, because of the nature of the subject matter and method of execution might give you the impression

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that we are dealing with a primitive artist. But transparencies, textures, the ability of the artist to communicate his thoughts visually demonstrates the primal vitality of his virtuosity. So why should we call this primitive?

This body of work, in which you see apparently different styles over the years (and even at the same moments) is clearly a purification of his obsession of painting, a consistent attitude of his reaffirmation as an artist. We are different and the same. It is not the superficial understanding of style that is important. It is the hidden signals in the work that forms the constant discourse, the constant search and discovery of a new language.

Between fashion and truth is the search of many artists. But Eloy Blanco traverses across both. He has his own world in his existential survival and he deserves it.
LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

1 One Eye Portrait
   1947, Oil on Window Shade
   9 x 7 1/2 inches

2 Armless Women
   1949, Oil on Canvas Board
   24 x 18 inches

3 Long Neck
   1949, Oil on Canvas
   25 x 17 inches

4 Green Face
   1949, Oil on Canvas Board
   24 x 18 inches

5 A Mother
   1949, Oil on Canvas
   20 x 16 inches

6 Nude Black Fish
   1960-1961, Oil on Canvas
   35 x 37 inches
   Collection of Ray Sundlin

7 Grandma
   1952, Oil on Beaverboard
   12 x 9 inches
   Collection of Joanne Armstrong

8 Man with Cigarette
   1953, Oil on Cardboard
   5 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches
   Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Shapiro

9 Man in a Straightjacket
   1954, Oil on Canvas
   19 x 25 inches
   Collection of Dr. Dave Feasell

10 Mental Patient
    1954, Oil on Canvas
    32 x 24 inches

11 New York Arrival
    1955, Oil on Canvas
    24 x 17 inches

12 Self Portrait
    1956, Oil on Canvas
    30 x 15 inches

13 Night Symbols
    1958, Oil on Canvas
    18 x 14 inches

14 Hercules and the Hydra
    1956, Oil on Canvas
    18 x 14 inches

15 An Ancient Message
    1958, Oil on Canvas
    26 x 19 1/2 inches

16 Siegfried in the Black Forest
    1957, Oil on Canvas
    18 x 20 inches

17 Woman
    1957, Oil on Canvas Board
    24 x 19 3/4 inches

18 Self Portrait
    1958, Oil on Canvas
    28 x 22 inches

19 Boomerang
    1958, Oil on Canvas
    36 x 20 inches

20 Golden Myth
    1959, Acrylic on Canvas
    31 x 22 inches
21 Seated Nude
1959, Oil on Canvas
46 1/2 x 40 1/4 inches

22 Thirst
1967, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
27 x 36 inches

23 Ancient Games
1983, Oil on Canvas
32 x 44 inches
Collection of Dr. Bernard Horowitz

24 Nude with Red Ribbon
1965, Oil on Canvas
24 x 20 1/2 inches
Collection of Kathleen C. Win

25 Nude
1966, Oil on Canvas
36 x 24 inches

26 Golden Message
1968, Oil on Canvas
16 x 20 inches

27 Indian Battle
1977, Oil on Canvas
33 x 22 inches
Collection of Dr. Bernard Horowitz

28 Ancient Symbols
1969, Oil on Canvas
30 x 30 inches

29 Self Portrait on Red
1970, Oil on Canvas
37 1/4 x 28 3/4 inches

30 The Creator
1972, Oil and Enamel on Canvas
24 x 18 inches

31 Nude
1972, Oil and Acrylic
36 x 30 1/4 inches

32 St. George
1972, Oil and Sand on Canvas
33 x 24 3/4 inches

33 Cave Wall
1972, Oil on Canvas
35 x 29 1/2 inches
Collection of Lawrence Breakstone

34 Battle with Dragon
1972, Oil on Canvas
24 x 19 inches

35 Seated Nude
1975, Oil on Canvas
32 x 24 inches
Collection of Michael Rubenstein

36 The Trap
1973, Acrylic on Canvas
27 1/4 x 25 1/2 inches
Collection of Ray Sundlin

37 Mask of Mendoza
1973, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
36 x 36 inches

38 Excavation
1973, Oil on Canvas
27 x 31 inches

39 Butterfly Hunt
1973, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
29 x 29 1/2 inches

40 Green Breasts
1974, Acrylic on Canvas
26 x 30 inches
41 Symbols of Childhood
1974, Acrylic on Canvas
57 1/4 x 71 1/4 inches

42 Mask with Snake
1975, Enamel and Acrylic on Canvas
32 x 24 inches

43 Mask Over Self Portrait
1975, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
30 x 16 inches

44 Day of the Dead
1976, Acrylic on Canvas
27 x 32 inches

45 Mask
1978, Acrylic on Canvas
16 1/4 x 23 3/4 inches
Collection of Natalia Agueros

46 Stained Glass Mask
1978, Oil on Canvas
32 x 24 inches
Collection of Bonita Bass

47 Blue-Green Mask
1978, Acrylic on Canvas
22 x 30 inches

48 Cosmic Ballet
1978, Acrylic on Canvas
42 1/4 x 36 inches

49 Astronaut
1977, Acrylic on Canvas
33 3/4 x 49 1/2 inches

50 Broken Wing
1977, Acrylic on Canvas
28 3/4 x 36 inches

51 Gravity Play
1978, Acrylic on Canvas
48 x 27 inches

52 Mythological Dream
1978, Acrylic on Canvas
23 x 26 inches

53 Nude with Cigarette
1980, Oil on Canvas
28 x 22 inches

54 Blue Figures on Blue
1981, Acrylic on Canvas
33 1/2 x 33 inches

55 Figures on Green
1982, Acrylic on Canvas
21 x 16 inches

56 Lost Crowd
1982, Acrylic on Canvas
30 x 24 inches

57 17,550 on Yellow
1982, Marker on Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 49 inches

58 7,401 on Red
1982, Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 47 1/2 inches

59 Colorful Spirits
1982-83, Acrylic on Canvas
83 1/2 x 47 inches
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Rican...In spite of not knowing Puerto Rican art, not knowing Taino art, there is an unexplainable relationship in my paintings, especially the masks.

It becomes apparent to the viewer that the paintings Blanco refers to as masks, with their strong, definitive shapes and delineated features, connect to a primitive imagery.

Blanco's portraits are expressive: the somber faces with haunting eyes, for example, evoke feelings of loneliness and the pathos of life. The NEW YORK ARRIVAL could be a classic portrait for many families, depicting pangs of memory of the seriousness and anxiety of the Puerto Rican migrant of the fifties.

As Blanco continued to experiment with different styles and techniques, simplistically shaped images began to emerge from the paint which at the outset he compared to cave paintings. As he worked textures and line more and more, the shapes began to take the form of what are now his stick figures. Upon close examination, even the crowded paintings show the figures expressing themselves by jumping, running, rolling over, dancing, and stretching over the surface of the canvas. As the stick figure paintings develop they become more and more complicated until they emerge into the very quality of the paint itself.

This exhibit attempts to unify and touch upon the highly charged and diverse modes of expression of this artist. Although limited by the number of works displayed, it is hoped that the viewer connects to the progression of energy which makes up the art of Eloy Blanco.

WILFREDO (ELOY) BLANCO
Born, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, 1933
1949-54
The Brooklyn Museum Art School, 1949-54
Studied with Max Beckman, William Baziotes,
Isadore Soyer, Ruben Tam and Louis Grobanak
At the present Mr. Blanco teaches art at the East Broadway School Education Alliance.

A television documentary based on his life and art is currently being produced by Macro Video Services, Burt Perlman, Executive Producer; Roy Bendlin and Michael Rubenstein, Associate Producers.

The artist's paintings will be shown in "Baby Legs" a film by Robert Doomey.

ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS
Brooklyn Museum School Gallery, 1949
Brooklyn Museum Community Gallery, 1950

East Side Project, 1961
Dom Gallery, 1965
St Marks Gallery, 1966
Cayman Gallery, 1970
Henry Street Settlement, 1978
The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1979
Manushi, New Delhi, India, 1980-1981

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
Brooklyn Museum, 1949-51, 52-53
Brooklyn College, 1961
Brooklyn Library, 1955
Windy Glass Gallery, 1963
Astor Gallery, 1984
Beals Gallery, Canada, 1984
El Museo del Barrio, 1978
Rhode Island University, 1979
Queens Museum, 1981
Inter Latin American Gallery, 1982