

Marcos Dimas

Cover: 2. Tiempo Pasado, 1975

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The Voyager



November 6, 1981—February 5, 1982

El Museo del Barrio
1230 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10029

Overleaf: Detail, "The Voyager", 1981

INTRODUCTION

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 disenfranchised 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 Dimas' work a striving for, a forming 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 surrealist. Nor is the core aesthetic of his work explained by stating that he utilizes the found object, that there is an element of Dada in his work. As I see it, it is the ethno-aesthetic realized in Marcos Dimas' 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 confusedly calls primitive art, making the so-called modern European and European American art neo-classical.

Through his art, Marcos 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 Dimas, it is his translation of it that makes his art contemporary in the most authentic sense.

There are questions raised and answers given by every artist, questions and answers about aesthetics, the form and content of art and the spuriousness and authenticity of culture. Marcos Dimas asks the question 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 naivete or ignorance of the art history of the planet.) Anthropologists and archeologists 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?

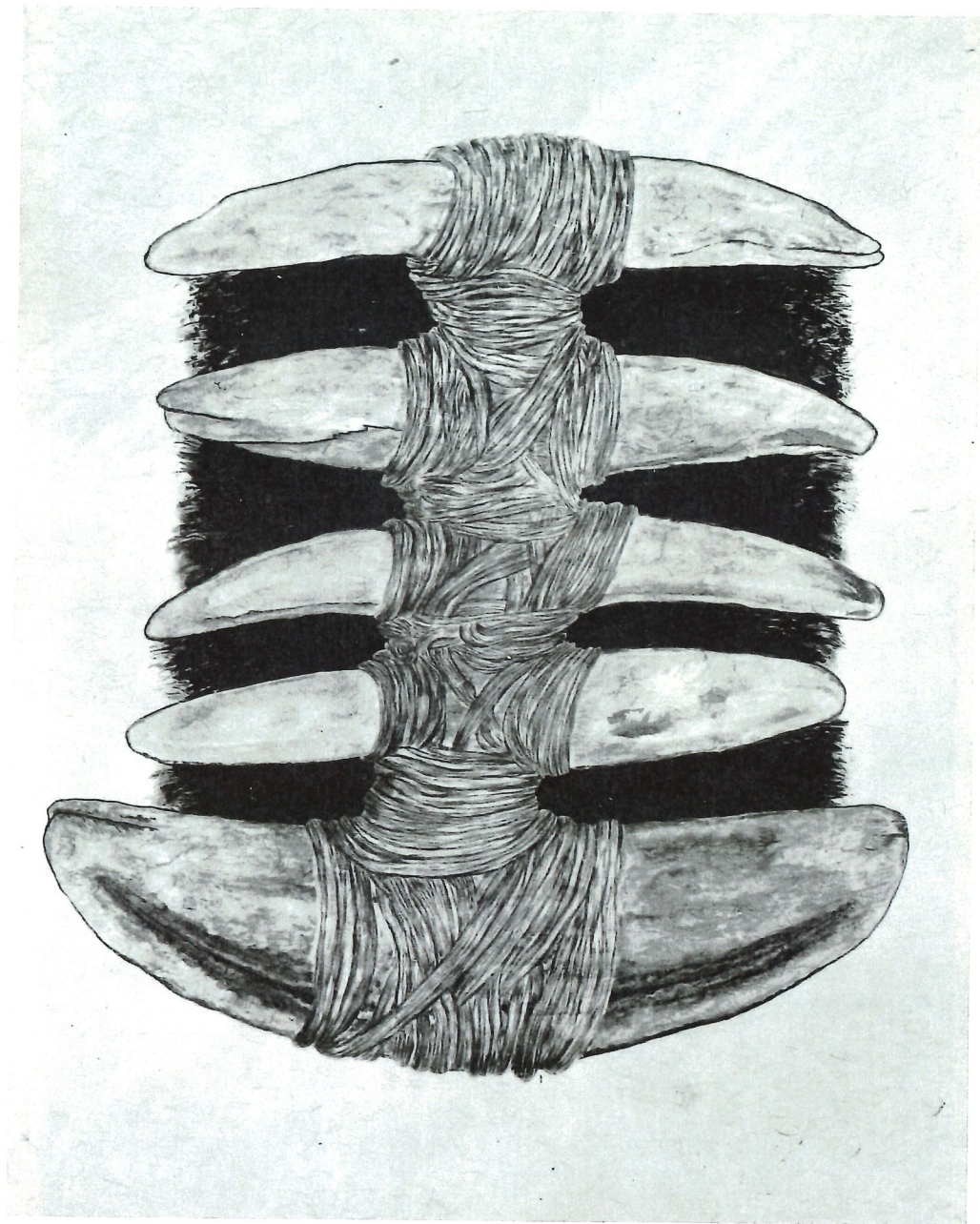
My answer is, it depends on your purpose; if your purpose is to be purposeless, okay. But if our art, the soul center cultural process of our being, is to authentically affirm and dignify all we are and can be, it must certainly affirm and dignify our authentic cultural artistic roots.

Every Hispanic and Puerto Rican community needs artists, who, like Marcos Dimas, 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, Rutgers University

16. Trapped in a Dream, 1978



10. The Chair and the Zag, 1981



5. The Guardian, 1978



15. Ritual Drum, 1975

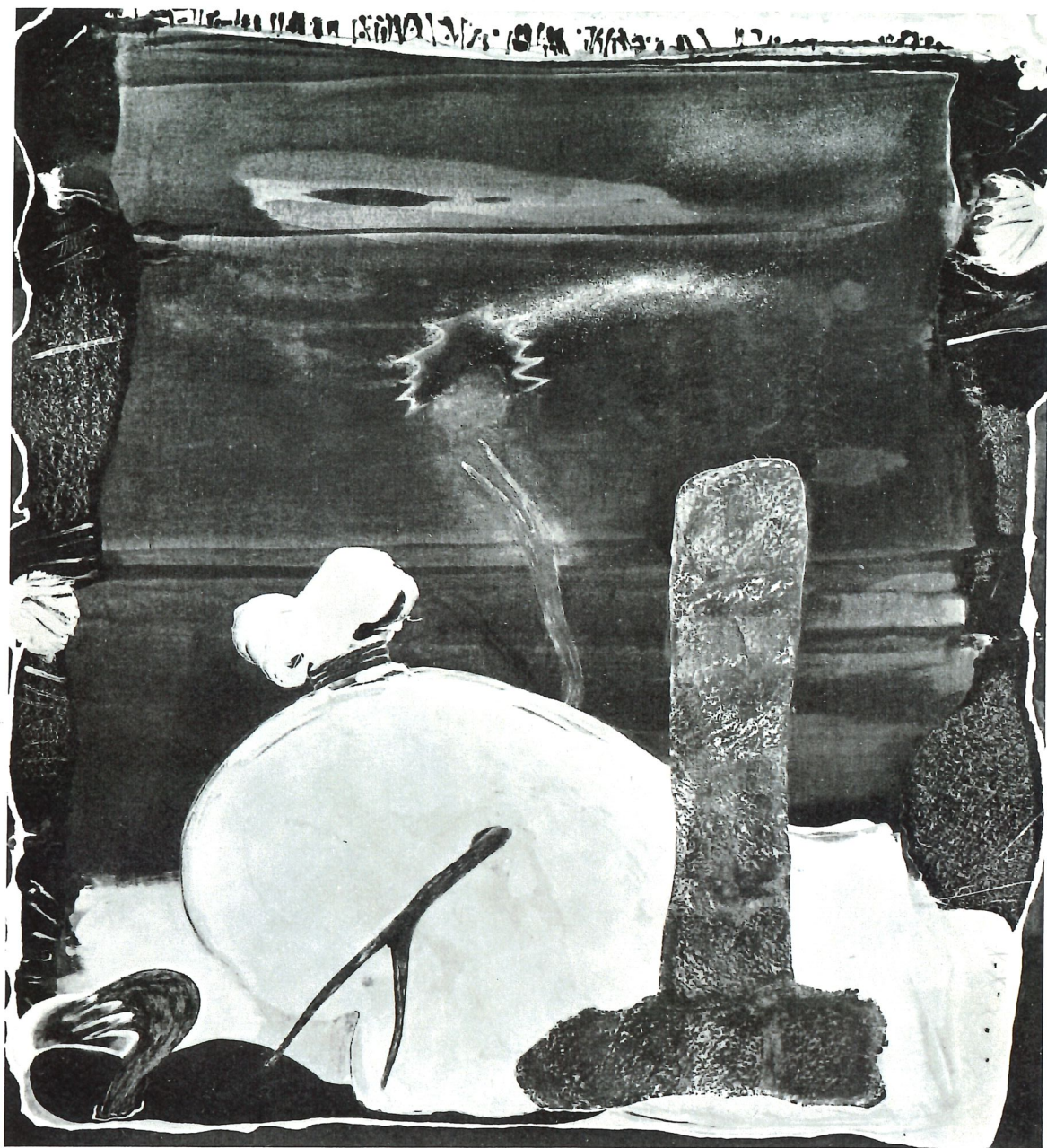


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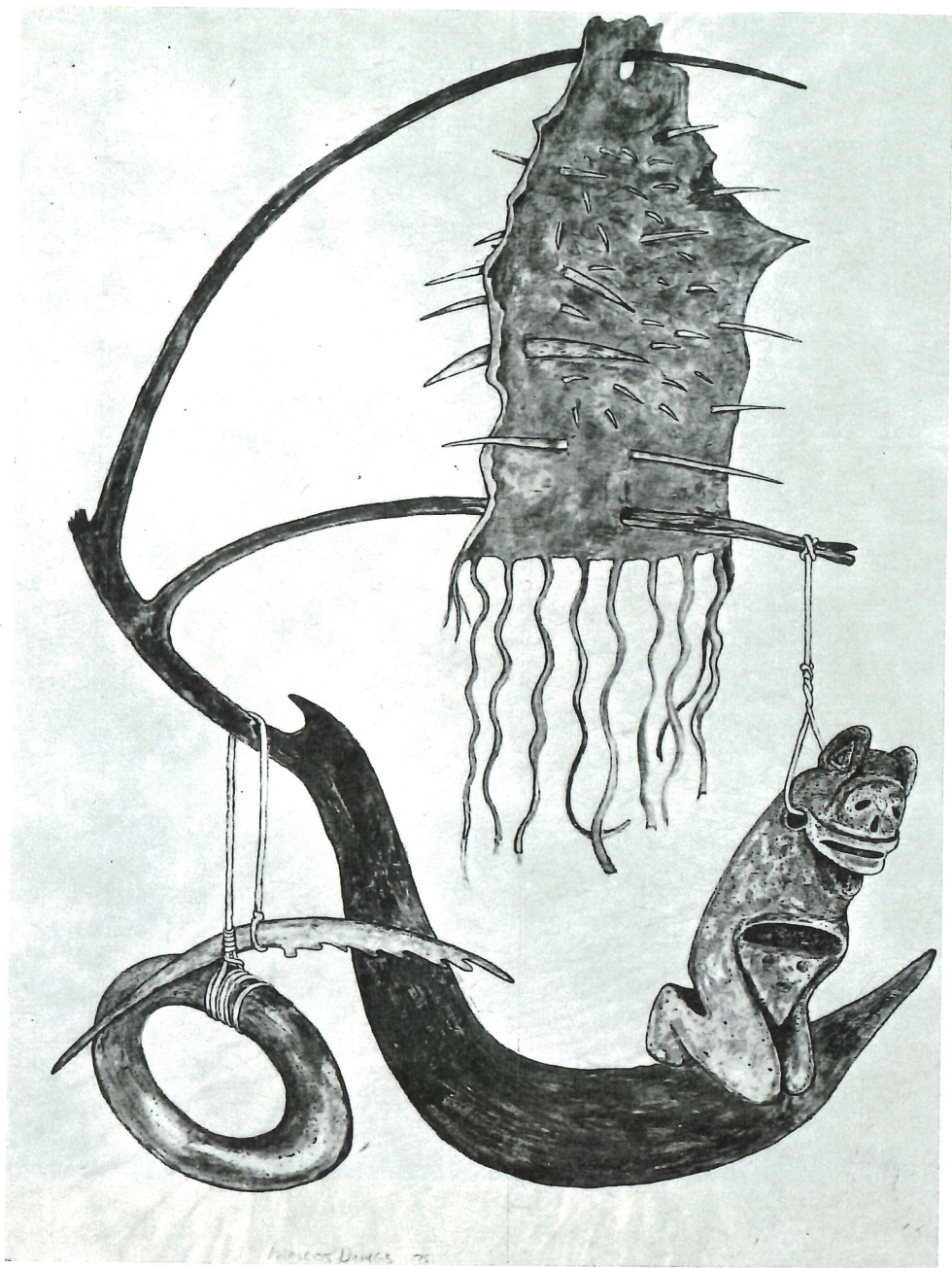
8. Evening Chant, 1980



6. Noche en Yuquiyu y La Luna Coquetiando, 1978



14. Opiyel Guaurioban, 1975



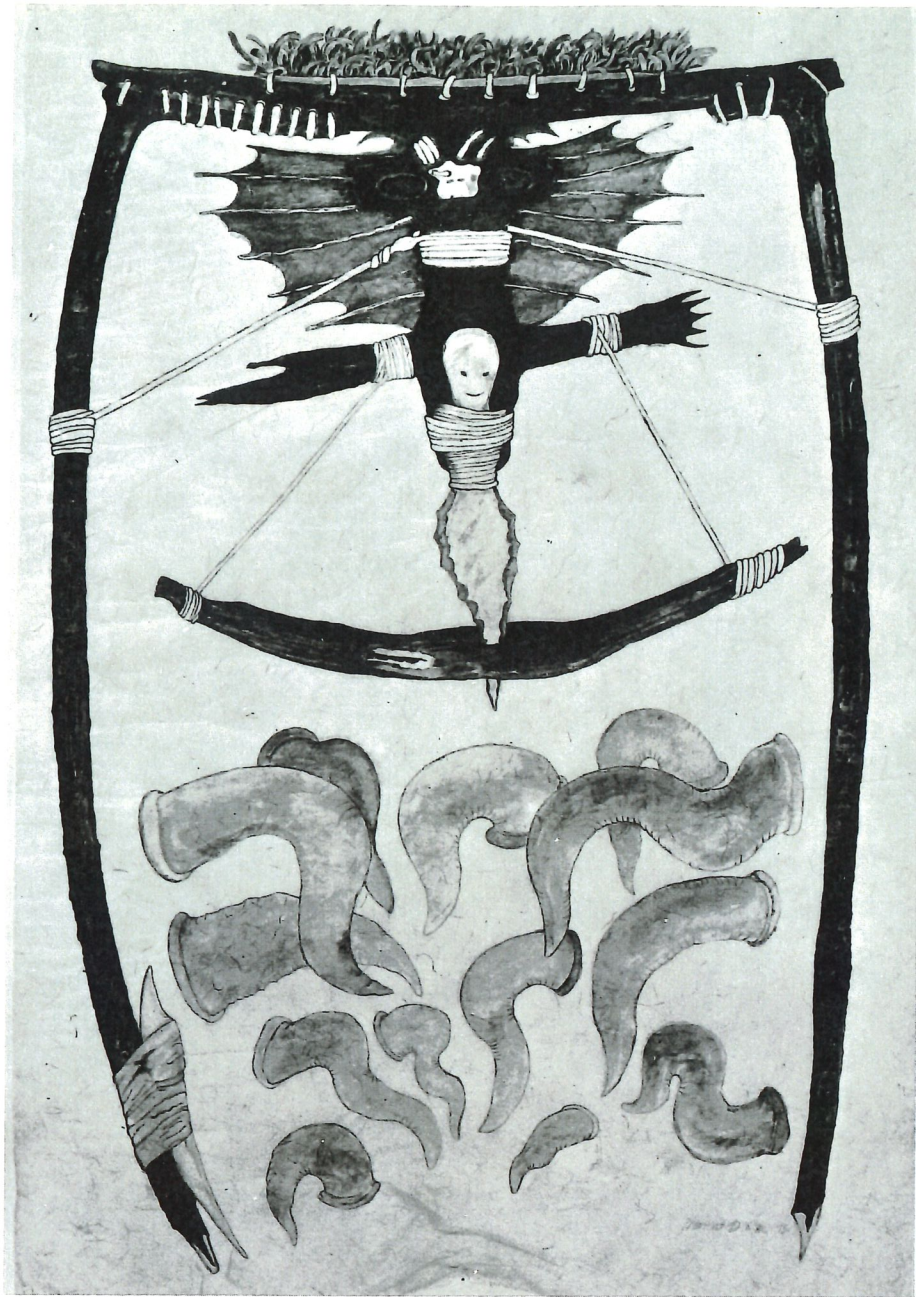
1. La Media Luna, 1974



3. The Calderón in the Closet, 1975



12. Passing Time, 1975

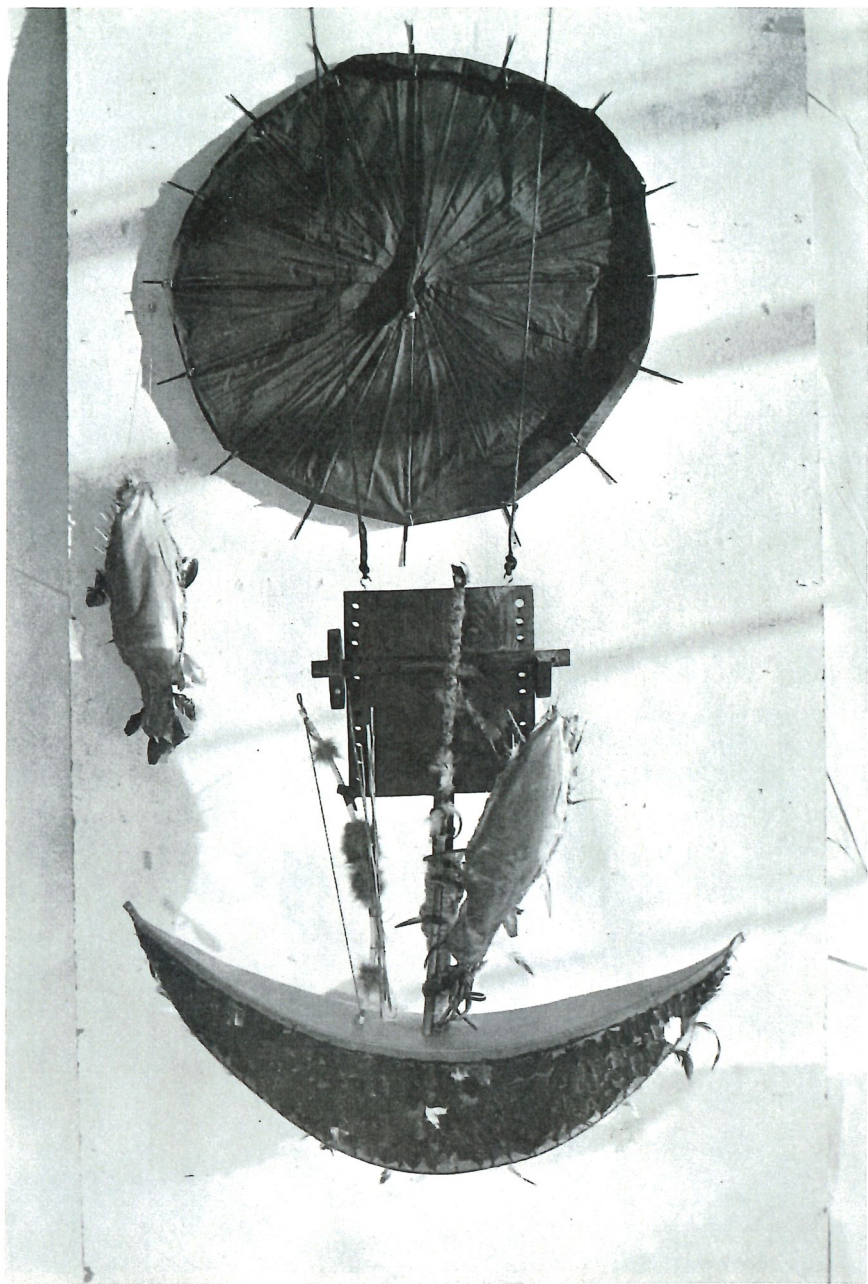


19. Vanity Table, 1974



FIG.

28. The Voyager, 1981

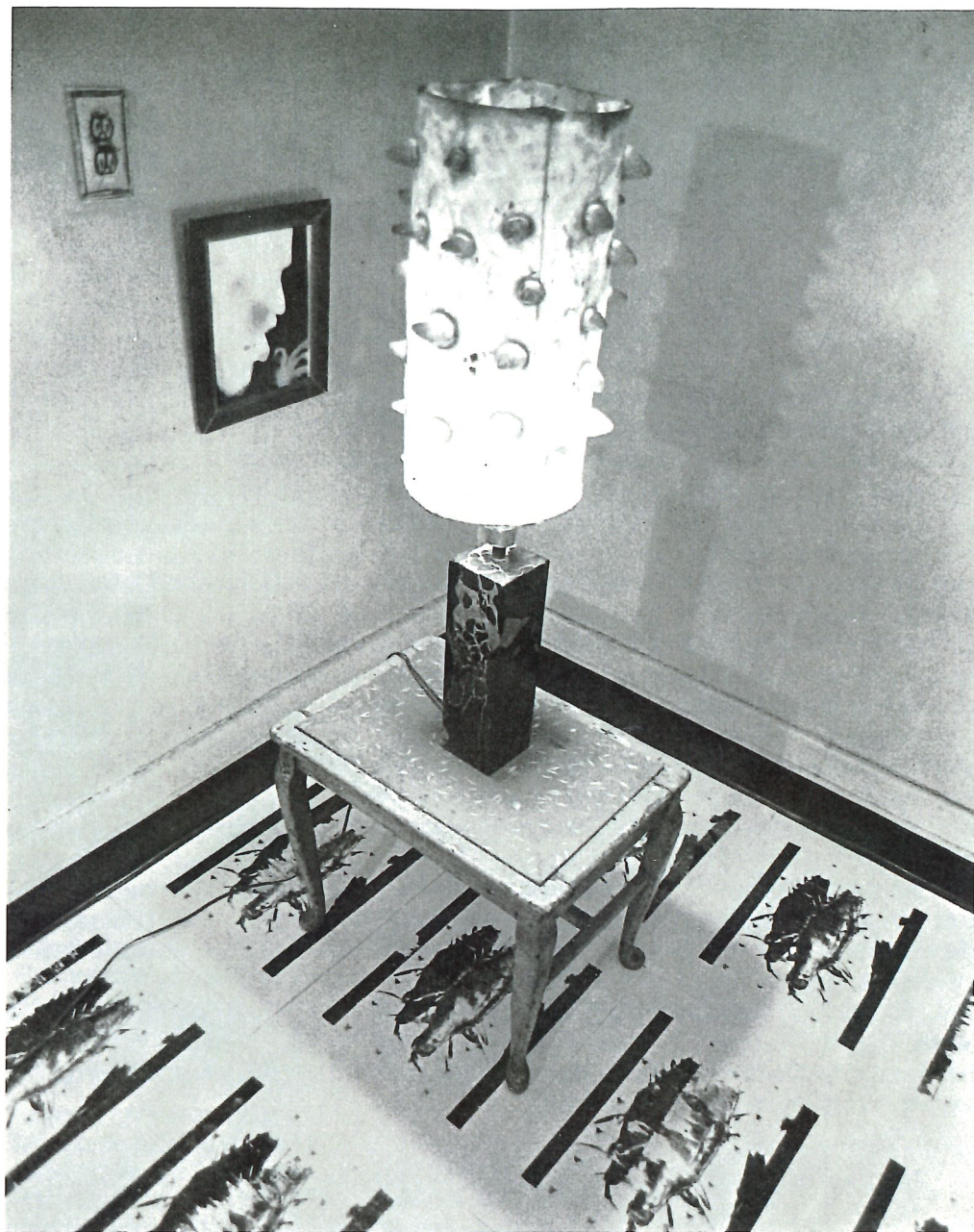


21. Chair, 1978



FIG.

22. Table and Lamp, 1980



STATEMENT

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 Osorio 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 format 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 "Pariah", "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 primeval 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 "Opiyel 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 DIMAS/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:

- 1981 El Museo Del Barrio, N.Y.C.
- 1979 Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.
Association of Hispanic Arts, N.Y.C.
- 1973 Museo Del Barrio, N.Y.C.
- 1971 Taller Boricua, N.Y.C.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1981 Hispanic Artists in New York, City Gallery N.Y.C.
Taller Boricua at Rutgers University, N.J.
Events, The New Museum, N.Y.C.
- 1980 Housotonic University Museum
Artists 79, United Nations Building, N.Y.C.
Private Icon, The Bronx Museum, N.Y.C.
Bridge Between Islands, El Museo Del Barrio, N.Y.C.
The Bronx Museum, N.Y.C.
- 1978 Henry Street Settlement, N.Y.C.
Bronx Artist, The Bronx Museum, N.Y.C.
- 1977 Soho, Whitney Counterweight, Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.
- 1976 NAM, The Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.C.
Spirit of Independence, Cayman Gallery, N.Y.C.
IMAN, Center for Inter American Relations, N.Y.C.
Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, P.R.
Museo de Arte de Ponce, P.R.
- 1975 Latin American Printmakers, Forum's Gallery, N.Y.C.
- 1974 Paintings and Assemblages, Forum's Gallery, N.Y.C.
- 1973 First Festival of Third World Arts, Hunter College, N.Y.C.
- 1971 Cinque Gallery, N.Y.C.
Automation House, N.Y.C.
- 1970 Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, N.Y.C.
- 1969 Contemporary Puerto Rican Artists, The Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.C.

LIST OF WORK

PAINTINGS, OIL ON CANVAS

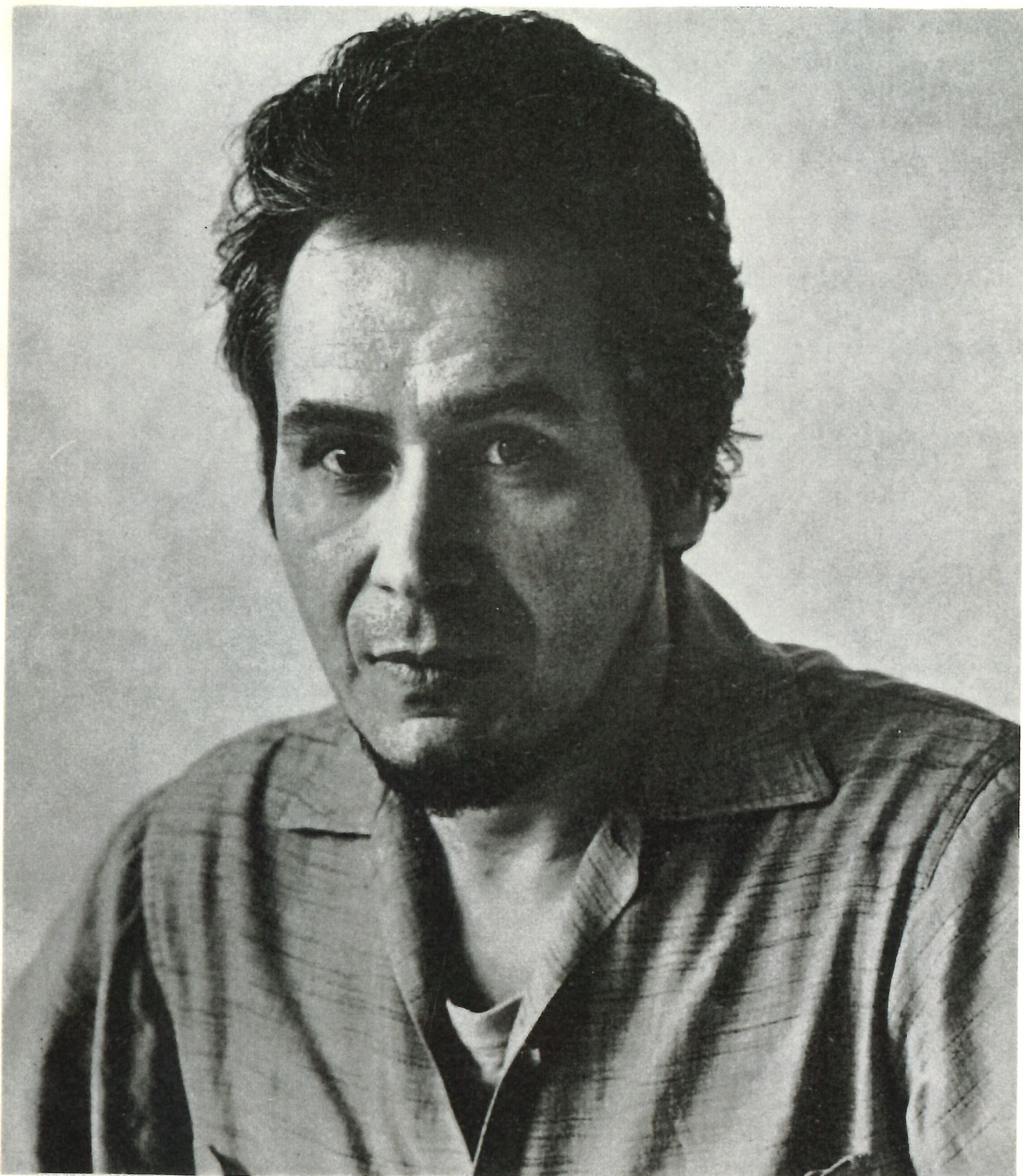
1. La Media Luna, 1974, 52" x 54"
2. Tiempo Pasado, 1975, 54" x 50"
3. The Calderón in the Closet, 1975, 54" x 50"
4. Space in Time, 1978, 54" x 46"
5. The Guardian, 1978, 54" x 48"
6. Noche en Yuquiyu y La Luna Coquetiando, 1978, 54" x 48"
7. El Bohique, 1980, 58" x 48"
8. Evening Chant, 1980, 38" x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

DRAWINGS, INK ON PAPER

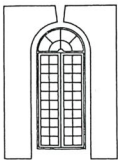
12. Passing Time, 1975, 35½" x 24"
13. Ritual Assemblages, 1975, 35" x 24"
14. Opiyel Guaurioban, 1975, 35" x 24"
15. Ritual Drum, 1975, 35½" x 24"
16. Trapped in a Dream, 1978, 35½" x 24"
17. Three Elephants, 1978, 35½" x 24"

ASSEMBLAGES, MIXED MEDIA

18. Spirit Trap, 1974, 24" x 16" x 60"
19. Vanity Table, 1974, 8" 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. Bed, 1981, 60" x 31" x 72"
24. Untitled Wall Piece I, 1981, 14" x 14"
25. Pectoral Piece, 1981, 17" x 18"
26. Panorama, 1981, 48" x 15"
27. Hanging Mirror, 1981, 18" x 16"
28. The Voyager, 1981, 36" x 38" x 96"
29. A Rose Among Thorns, 1981, 6" x 12"



Frank Gimpaya



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