



ELOY BLANCO

"Faces and Figures"

A RETROSPECTIVE

East Wing

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

February 25, 1983



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 Baziotis, 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 nuances 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

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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 artists' 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 execute a kind of express 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".

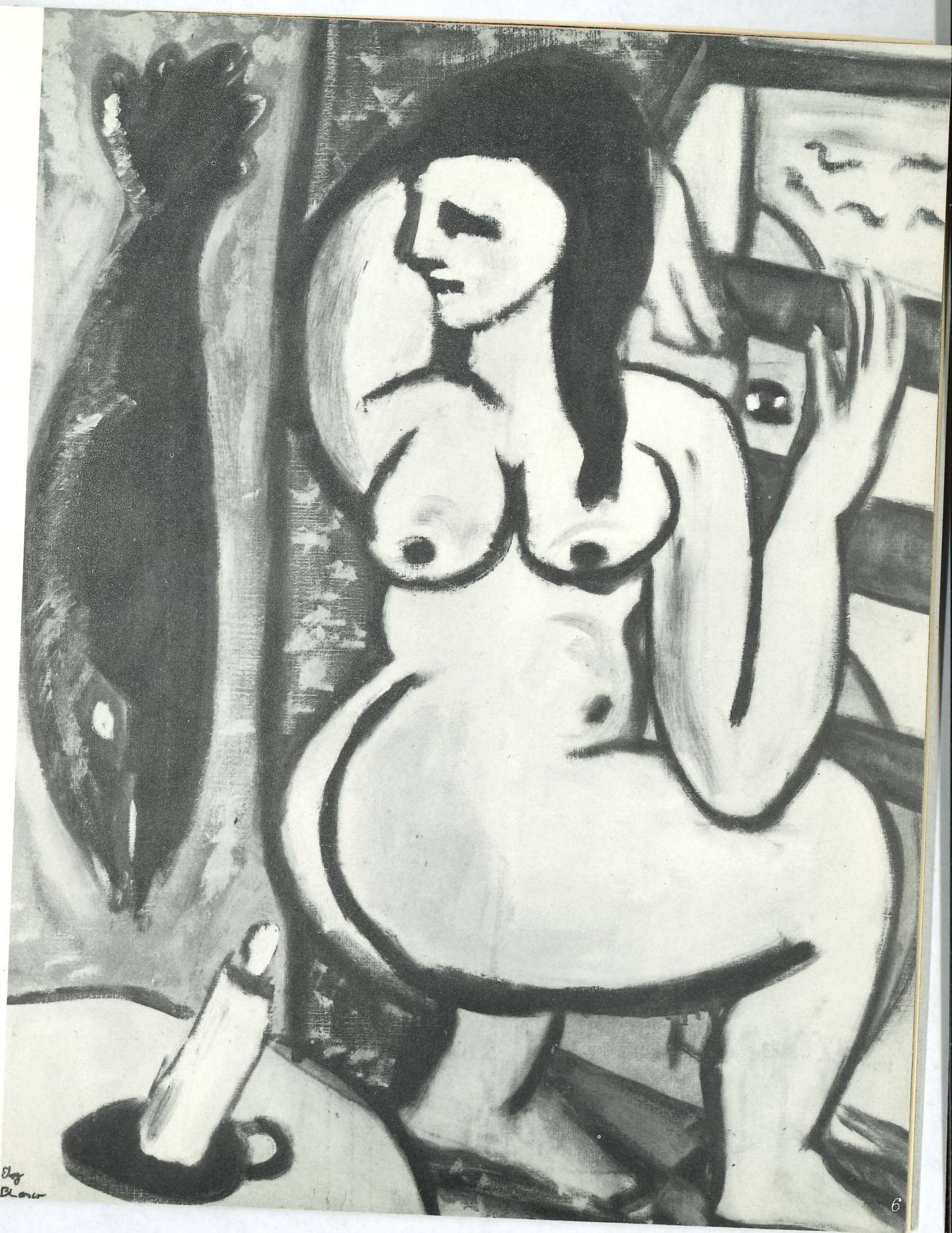
With these works, he not only introduces religious legends into his thoughts, he transmutes the organic texture and the so called primitive look alike drawings into religious icons. In every person is a primal vitality. Some of these paintings, because of the nature of the subject matter and method of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

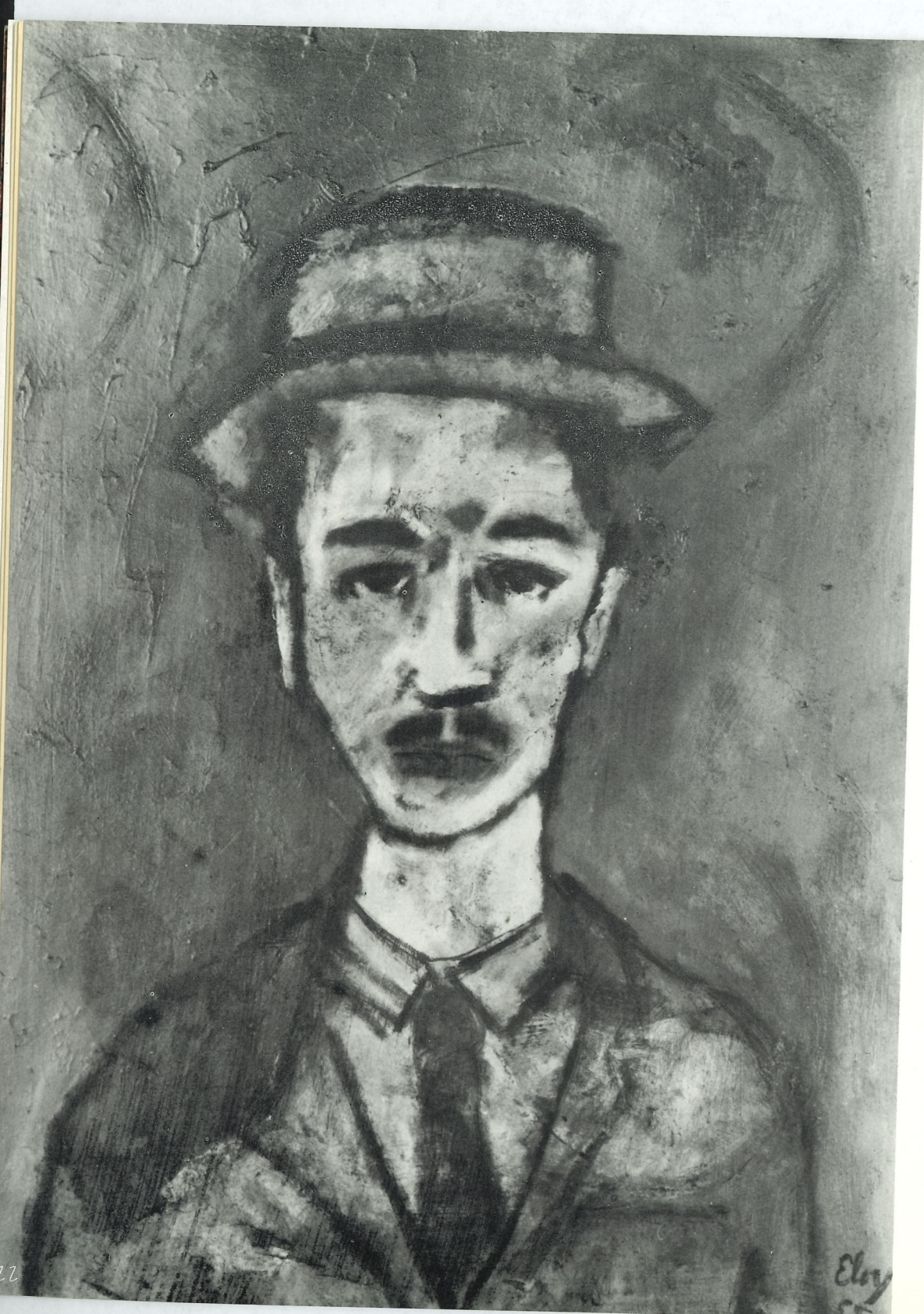
that we are dealing with a primitive artist. But transparencies, textures, the ability of the artist to communicate his thoughts visually demonstrates the primal vitality of his virtuosity. So why should we call this primitive?

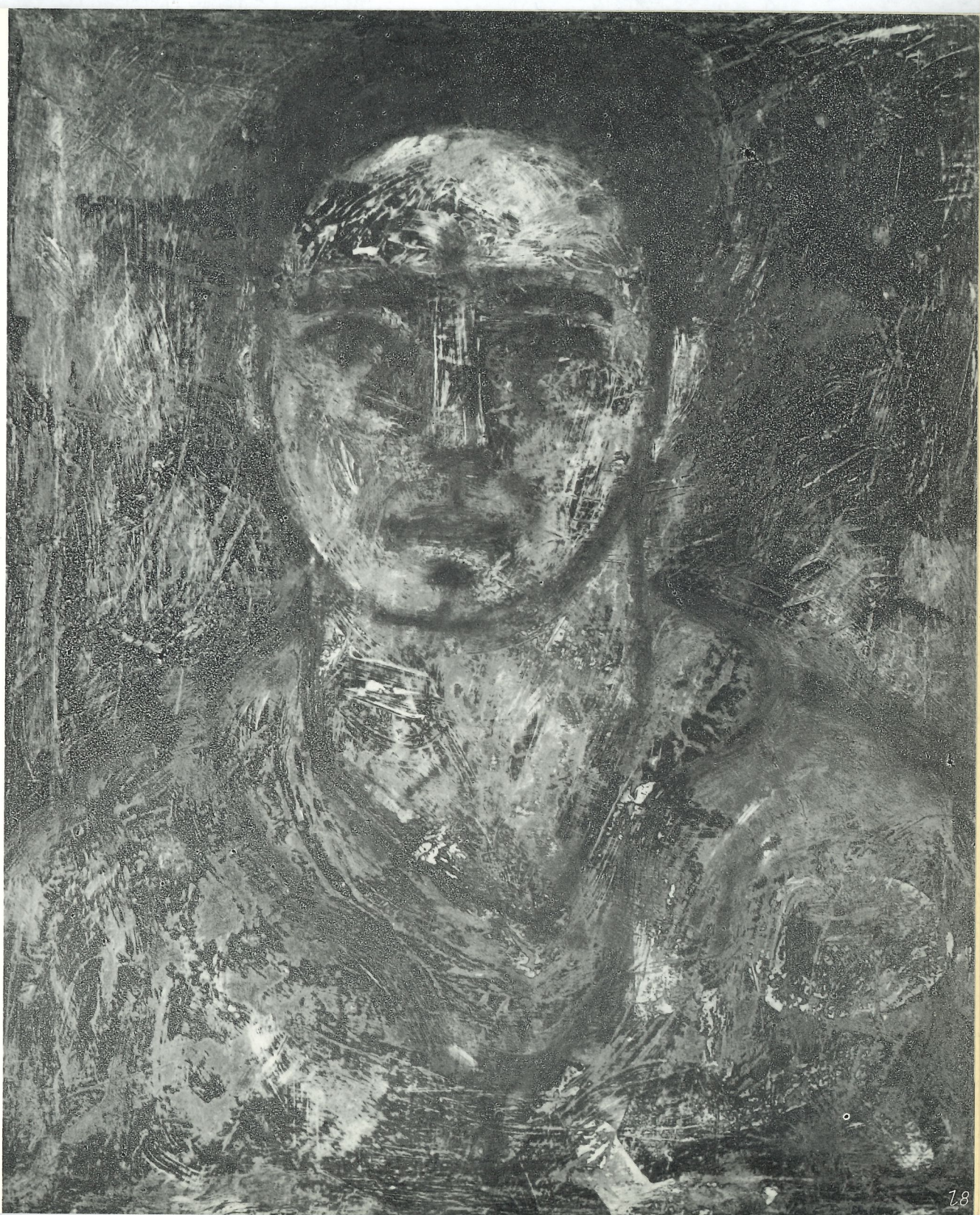
This body of work, in which you see apparently different styles over the years (and even at the same moments) is clearly a purification of his obsession of painting, a consistent attitude of his reaffirmation as an artist. We are different and the same. It is not the superficial understanding of style 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.

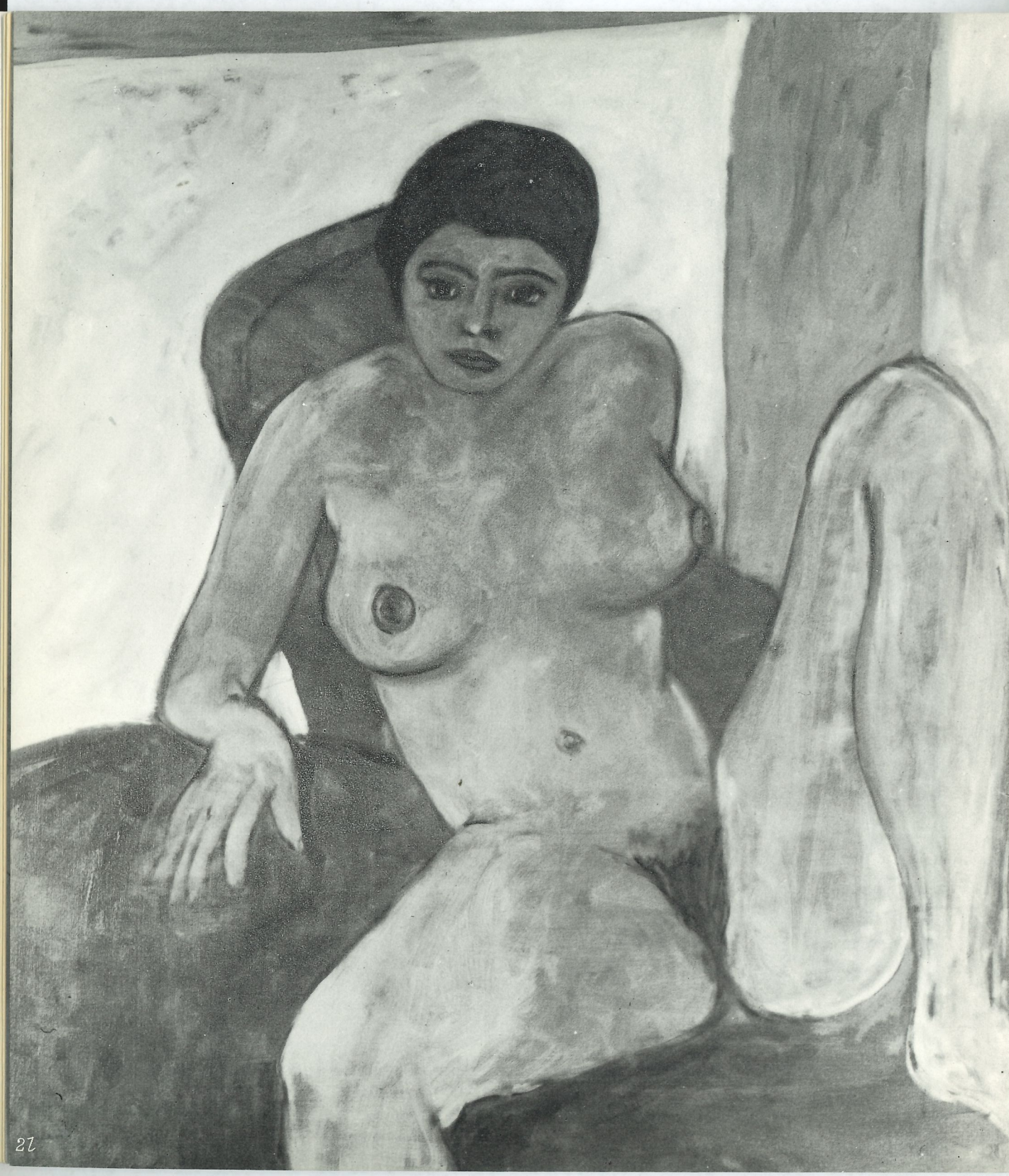
Between fashion and truth is the search of many artists. But Eloy Blanco traverses across both. He has his own world in his existential survival and he deserves it.

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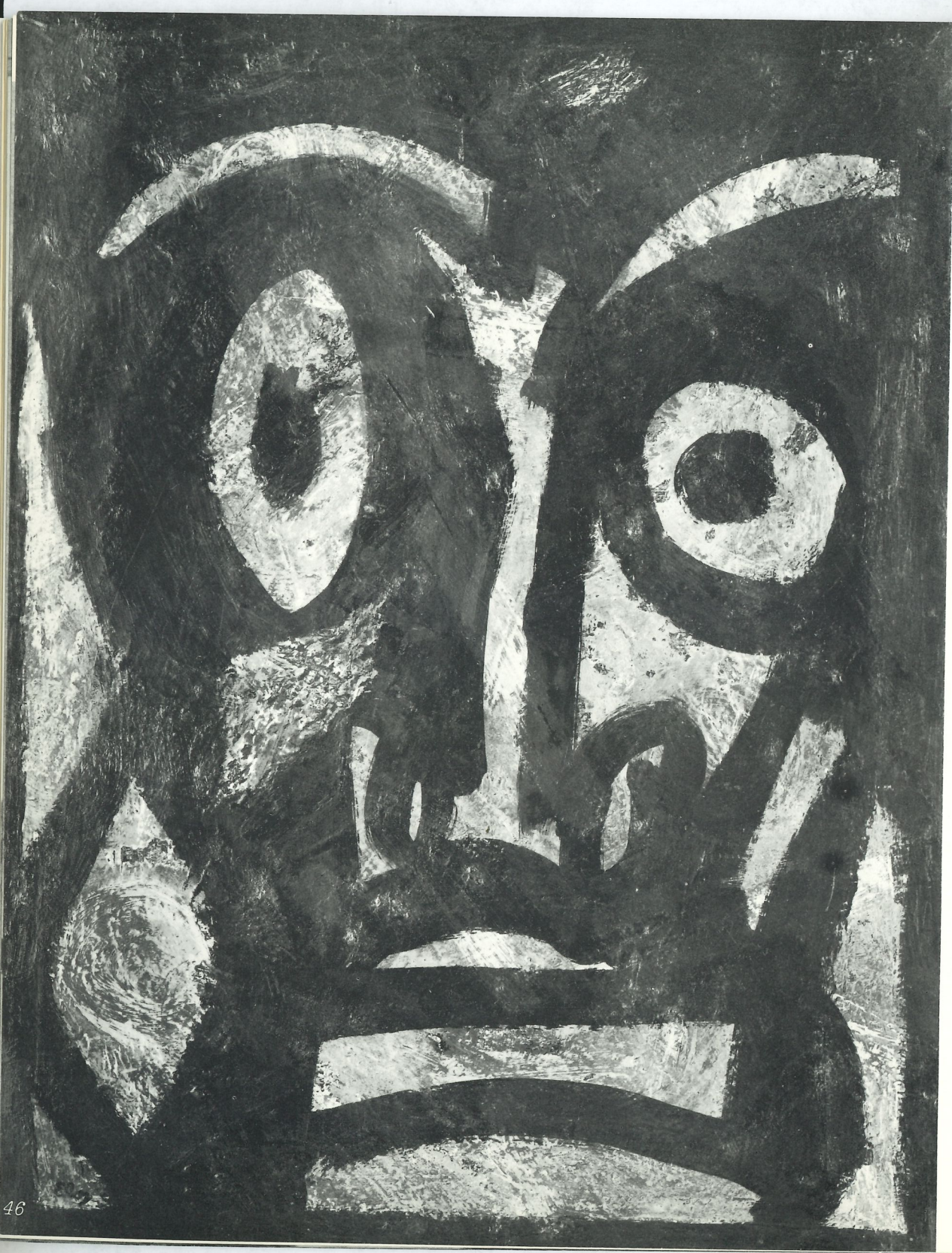












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LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

- 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
1950-1951, *Oil on Canvas*
35 x 27 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*
18 x 15 inches
Collection of Dr. Dave Feazell
- 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*
20 x 15 inches
- 13 Night Symbols
1956, *Oil on Canvas*
18 x 14 inches
- 14 Hercules and the Hydra
1956, *Oil on Canvas*
18 x 14 inches
- 15 An Ancient Message
1956, *Oil on Canvas*
23 x 19 1/2 inches
- 16 Siegfried in the Black Forest
1957, *Oil on Canvas*
12 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*
26 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
1961, *Oil and Acrylic on Canvas*
27 x 36 inches
- 23 Ancient Games
1963, *Oil on Canvas*
32 x 55 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
1966, *Oil on Canvas*
16 x 20 inches
- 27 Indian Battle
1967, *Oil on Canvas*
33 x 29 inches
Collection of Dr. Bernard Horowitz
- 28 Ancient Symbols
1969, *Oil on Canvas*
24 x 20 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*
23 x 24 3/4 inches
- 33 Cave Wall
1972, *Oil on Canvas*
36 x 29 1/2 inches
Collection of Lawrence Breakstone
- 34 Battle with Dragon
1972, *Oil on Canvas*
24 x 18 inches
- 35 Seated Nude
1973, *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*
28 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*
20 x 16 inches
- 44 Day of the Dead
1976, *Acrylic on Canvas*
27 x 32 inches
- 45 Mask
1976, *Acrylic on Canvas*
16 1/4 x 23 3/4 inches
Collection of Natalia Agueros
- 46 Stained Glass Mask
1976, *Oil on Canvas*
32 x 24 inches
Collection of Bonita Bess
- 47 Blue-Green Mask
1976, *Acrylic on Canvas*
22 x 30 inches
- 48 Cosmic Ballet
1976, *Acrylic on Canvas*
42 1/4 x 36 inches
- 49 Astronaut
1977, *Acrylic on Canvas*
29 3/4 x 49 1/2 inches
- 50 Broken Wing
1977, *Acrylic on Canvas*
26 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*
63 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 onset 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 Baziotas,
Isaac Soyer, Ruben Tam and Louis Grebenak

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 Service, Byrant Werda, Executive
Producer. Ray Sandlin and Michael
Rubenstein, Associate Producers.

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

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, 1976

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, 1951

Brooklyn Library, 1955

Windy Glass Gallery, 1963

Actors Gallery, 1964

Reads Gallery, Canada, 1964

El Museo del Barrio, 1978

Rhode Island University, 1979

Queens Museum, 1981

Intar Latin American Gallery, 1982

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