

Basic Detail Report



Title Herencia Taina: Legacy and Life Exhibition Installation, 1997

Date 1997

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Medium slides

Description Photographs of the "Herencia Taina: Legacy and Life" exhibition

displays and installation. (.1) & (.20) Various carved objects of spirit beings,

amulets, ceremonial, and spiritual pieces displayed in the exhibit. From the

object label: "These objects show the ways in which amulets representing spirit

beings or personal spirit animals, body stamping with colored designs, and 3-

pointed cemís symbolizing the spirit being Yúcahu were all part of Taino

religious practice. Fasting and vomiting spatulas were used to purge the body

before rituals to gain visions through inhaling tobacco and cohoba. These and

other ceremonies were communal spiritual journeys back to the ancestors.

Today's artists re-create this journey through their art work." The objects

pictured include: a cast stone duho (chair) by Antonio Blasini, Ponce loaned by

FOMENTO; a carved stone human figure from Puerto Rico loaned by Peabody

Museum, Yale; a carved stone effigy figure from Puerto Rico loaned by Peabody

Museum, Yale; a santo made by Angel Rodríguez, Jayuya loaned by Lynne

Williamson; a stone cemí and a carved stone disc with face loaned by Peabody

Museum, Yale; a Cohoba pipe made of driftwood, for inhaling ground cohoba

seeds, made and loaned by Mel González; a vomiting spatula for purging before

ceremonies made and loaned by Mel González; a small modern cast stone cemí

made by Antonio Blasini, Ponce and loaned by Roberto Borrero; and

archaeological artifacts from Puerto Rico (3 conch shell amulets; round clay

body stamp; 1 shell amulet; ceremonial stone axe; 1 stone figure) loaned by

Roberto Múcaro Borrero. (.2) Installation of Herencia Taina exhibit in the ICR

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Gallery. (.3) Higüera (gourds) carved by Graciela Quiñones-Rodriguez. Higüeras, which grow on trees in a variety of sizes, have been used as utensils and vessels by Puerto Ricans for centuries. Tainos would use them for ceremonial bowls or as everyday cups or ladles. They are cut open, the inedible pulp scooped out, then dried. The artist sometimes carves them with hand tools while green and soft on the outside, but she also uses an electric dremel to carve the hardened gourds. The designs are inspired by Taino motifs she sees on rock carvings and pottery or learns about from other researchers. Objects clockwise from the top include: Diosa Caguana y Fertilidad, the spirit being Atabey is surrounded by smaller symbols suggesting fertility; Criatura Vegetal, one interpretation of how people came to be is that they developed from plants; Diosa Sencilla, this design of a spirit being is one of the artist's favorites. The unusual border departs from Taino motifs as the artist combines other styles.; Criatura Taína, this design uses a central symbol which suggests a baby, while on the sides are playful motifs possibly representing fertilized eggs; Diosa con Ornamentos, the figure of Atabey, with dancing figures around the sides giving a sense of movement; and Carita Yabucoa, the symbols are taken from rubbings of petroglyphs in Yabucoa discovered in 1996. In the center is Divinidad Feminina, a depiction of a fertility spirit being, with one interpretation of the geometric border designs being the division of cells of a fertilized egg. The artist feels that such geometric designs are charged with energy. (.4) Wall text and images explaining Taíno Lifeways. (.5-.6), (.8), & (.15) Part of the installation including art works and instruments by Mel Gonzalez, a poster of Jayuya, and the gourd cuatro made by Graciela Quiñones-

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Rodriguez. Posters from the Festival Nacional Indígena, donated to the exhibit

by Félix González, Centro Cultural Jayuyano. Each year a Puerto Rican artist is

commissioned by the Institute of Culture to create a poster for the annual

Festival of indigenous culture held in Jayuya. The tradition of beautifully

designed, colorful silkscreened posters announcing events is very strong in

Puerto Rico. Objects Pictured: - Spirit Mask, Turtle shell, grass, nuts, fish spines,

ocelot fur, feathers. This mask represents Mabuyuawayunque, the dark spirit of

the jungle, a metaphor for the unknown. Although the earth provides people

with sustenance, there are also dangers if the ways of nature are not understood

and respected. The face is both amusing and frightening, neither male nor

female but signifying all the ancestors. The feathers come from owls, the

messengers of death, as well as from macaws symbolizing the green and blue of

the earth and the red of fire and blood. - Musical Instruments, Melanio González,

Loaned by the Artist. Mayahuacan: This type of drum is common throughout the

southern Americas and the Caribbean. It is essentially a hollowed log with a

resonator formed by cutting a H-shape in the top. They provided a form of

communication "announcing" an event or a ceremony taking place, then were

played as accompaniment to dancing. The big mayahuacan, made from cedar, is

played often by the artist when he performs with the music group Cacibajagua.

As in all his recreations of Taino artifacts, González has imbued the drum with

symbols which have special meaning. It is carved in the shape of a cemí, the

three-pointed stones representing the earth spirit Yúcahu. The ornamentations

honor different elements of Taino culture: the shells of the sea, brass meaning

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the gold of the ancestors, buffalo rib teeth to honor North American Indians, and carved designs signifying the fertility of the plowed earth. The drumsticks have natural latex rubber heads, Brazil nuts from the original Taino homeland of the Orinoco River, and feathers of múcaro (owl) and parrot. One of the smaller drums is shaped like a cayman. Wanwana: Used only for special occasions by men, this hollow wind instrument common to the indigenous Americas is made from Gulf Coast cane. The word means "breath of life," and in ceremonies it "clears the way" of evil thoughts or spirits, so that goodness can flourish; it sounds both a blessing and a warning. The geometric snake design represents change; the black and red remind the artist of the near-death experience he once had, and the múcaro (owl) feathers are messengers from the past, or perhaps death. Maracas: Tainos made maracas (a Guaraní Indian word) out of an elongated gourd with an extended skin handle. As Africans and Tainos shared cultures on the island, the maracas changed, becoming more commonly made from dried higüeras filled with small seeds or pebbles. The pair with geometric designs, made in Peru, were given to González by a South American healer. The pair with the frog design were made by Antonio Ortiz Vegerano of Luquillo, PR; loaned by FOMENTO. Rattle: Brazil nuts, snake designs, plowed earth designs, the frog representing new life, ocelot fur all decorate this percussion instrument created out of the artist's personal vision. (.7), (.11), & (.14) Art works by Imna Arroyo. - Atabey, Watercolor and ink on paper, Loaned by Gail Cueto. In Taino mythology Atabey is the "mother of the waters" and the sky, governing and being part of the moon, the tides, female cycles, and fertility. In this work

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Atabey, who is often carved on stone as at Caguana Ceremonial Park in Utuado, Puerto Rico, is given a three-dimensional form to show she is embedded in nature. The cemí is shown because "this is the spirit of the mountain, and she's the water, and she comes out of the mountain which is how the rivers are formed." The artist uses the cocoon or seed images as symbols of the human potential within ourselves. - La Semilla/The Seed - A Puerto Rican Identity Piece, watercolor. According to the artist: "This piece is about recognizing these symbols and their place in the shaping of an identity...The Puerto Rican flag echoing the shape of el cemí...I wanted to put them together because there are four elements that define the symbolic language of this watercolor. The Taino heritage; the Spanish heritage is symbolized by a chalice...and I used real gold leaf because that's part of our colonial heritage and the reason why the Spanish came to the island, and the price we paid for the gold is part of it. The woman is African...she has a fertility symbol hanging, made of gold...we know that the people that came from Africa came from the Gold Coast...The sky and the sun are important elements. You can't live without water or without light, light always gives you a sense of celebration, of moving forward." - Herencia Latina, Silkscreen on silk fabric, with stitching and beadwork. Part of a series of banners from the Celebrating Cultures Project initiated by the Printmaking Club at Eastern Connecticut State University. Imna Arroyo has been the advisor of the club since 1994. The artist draws upon familiar Taino imagery such as the cemí, combining these with other Puerto Rican and Latin American symbols. She has rubbed real hojas de laurel into the screen with litho crayon, reflecting the

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Spanish use of laurel leaves. For the artist, the banner brings together Spanish,

African, and indigenous elements, as they have combined to produce Latino

culture. - Ancestral Call: Abuela Criolla, oil on canvas. One of two portraits of the

artist's grandmothers, this painting reflects the Spanish and Indian roots of her

maternal grandmother. The other portrait is called Abuela Africana. The artist

says: "By looking at the family pictures, (I saw that) this woman is indeed a

criolla. And my other one is very African...coming from my own family, I'm

bringing that heritage forward and identifying it and acknowledging it and

claiming it." (.9) Mel Gonzalez's art work in the section showing a model bohio

and domestic objects. (.10) A close view of a carved wooden duho (chair) on the

bottom with a cedar carving of 'Baibrama' - the male spirit of agriculture and

harvest.- standing on top of it. (.12) The Mano a Mano exhibit in the ICR Gallery in

1999, another CCHAP exhibit about Puerto Rican folk arts. (.13) Speakers at the

Herencia Taina panel discussion. Pictured are Roberto Mucaro Borrerro (left),

Don José Juan Arrom and Doña Arrom (center), and Mel Gonzalez (right). (.16)

The exhibit entrance for "Herencia Taína: Legacy and Life" with a pottery

piece by Daniel Silva, which was loaned by Fomento. (.17-.18) Mel Gonzalez's art

work in the section showing a model bohio and domestic objects. (.19)

Indigenous poetry made by contemporary potters in Puerto Rico. Back left:

Modern bowl made by La Familia Cabachuela, Adornos similar to the

archaeological examples are on either handle; Loaned by Roberto Múcaro

Borrero. Front left and front right: Ancient clay adornos, Loaned by Roberto

Múcaro Borrero. Center: Modern pottery made by Daniel Silva, Vieques, Puerto

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Rico, Loaned by Fomento. Back right: Modern pottery made by Daniel Silva,

loaned by Fomento. “Archaeological finds in many regions of Puerto Rico show that clay was used to create pottery by the Tainos and their predecessors. A few modern potters have researched traditional Taino pottery, and use these methods to recreate Taino pottery forms. After handbuilding the pots from island clay, artists such as Daniel Silva and the Cabachuela family place them in the shade for a few days to dry. Then they are placed in the sun for two days, then fired in the foguera method - placed face down and covered with dead leaves, then "baked" in a bonfire.” (.21) Carved and woven objects.