

# Basic Detail Report

## **Title Herencia Taina: Legacy and Life Exhibition Installation, 1997**

Date 1997

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

# Basic Detail Report

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

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

# Basic Detail Report

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-

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

# Basic Detail Report

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 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

# Basic Detail Report

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

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

# Basic Detail Report

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 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 bohío 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 Borreró (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 bohío 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

# Basic Detail Report

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

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.