

Basic Detail Report

Title Objects in Herencia Taina Exhibition

Date 1997

Primary Maker Melanio Gonzalez

Medium photographs

Description Photographs of objects displayed in the Herencia Taina exhibition. (.

1) A cuatro made from an higüera by Graciela Quinones-Rodriguez. This

instrument traditionally played as part of música jibara, the folk music of the

mountains, has been carved with symbols of the three main cultural influences

in Puerto Rico. The seashell represents the island, its indigenous peoples, and

the marine life of the sea. Spanish influence is expressed by the Madonna icon

and the lookout tower of El Morro, the fortress of San Juan. The vejigante mask

and the couple dancing the bomba signify African cultural forms. The

development of Puerto Rico as a nation is symbolized by the faces of Alejandrina

Torres and Pedro Albizu Campos. The jibaro figures cutting sugar cane and

playing the cuatro are the sometimes idealized symbols of Puerto Rican rural

life, and also show the harvest celebrations. The Taino divided triangles around

the border signify fertility and the creation of life, showing that the culture is in

constant evolution. On the front, the headpiece is shaped like a cemí, the artist's

tribute to Taino culture. (.2) A mayohuacán (Taíno log drum) made by Mel

Gonzalez. 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

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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 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. (.3) Bone and shell amulets (archaeological) from the collection of Roberto Múcaro Borrero.