

TERRITORIES

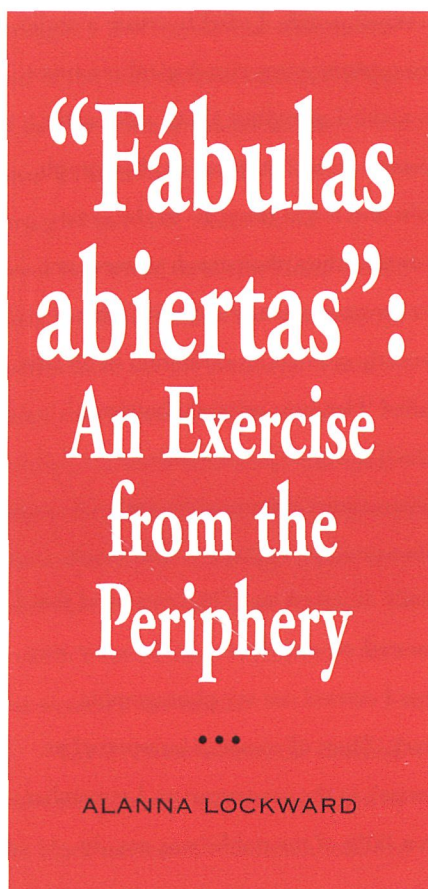
"The universality of art is so far away from denial of the principle of selection by means of vital interest that it depends upon interest."

(John Dewey)

ART AS EXPERIENCE

These Dominican installation artists must confront the challenge of creating the precedent of the contemporary, with the heavy breathing and the accelerated heart-beat endemic to the end of this millennium, a reality submerged in an ocean of aesthetically inconsistent commonplace. They swim against local and international currents in an amazing demonstration of poetic and intellectual muscle. Tony Capellán, Mónica Ferreras, Marcos Lora Read, Jorge Pineda and Belkys Ramírez must also convince the neocolonizers of globalization (in the framework of the international art exhibition circuit), that the contemporary not only exists in the Dominican Republic, but that it exists well. This is a war on two fronts, a war that is intensified by the accelerated "cubanization" of the distribution of visual arts from the Caribbean, to which the connoisseurs have been thoroughly exposed.

"Fábulas Abiertas" is an effort to museographically paraphrase the expectations of those who dream that



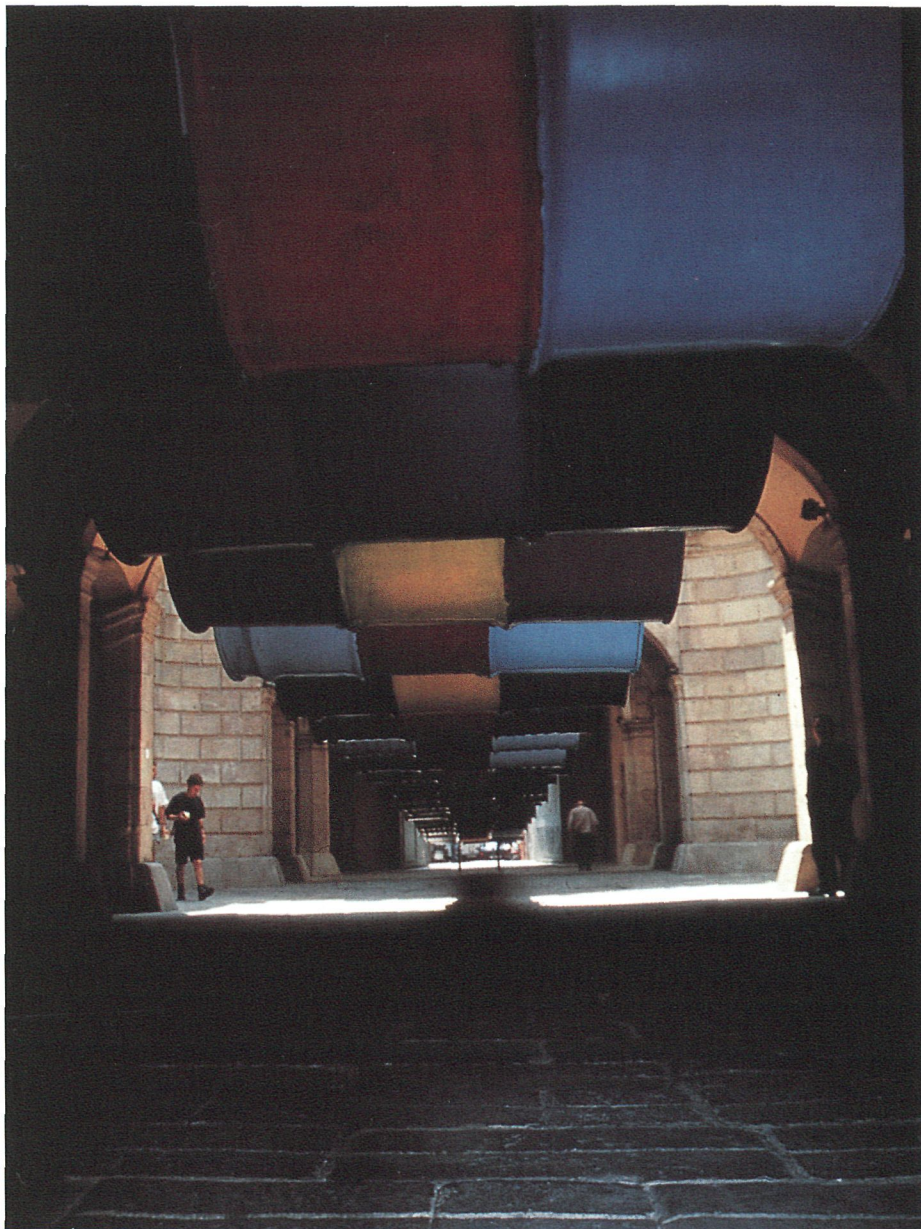
the young generation of Dominican artists will finally be able to exorcise the demons of "marginality within marginality." In other words, it is an attempt to break with the long rosary of international group shows from which Dominican artists have been perennially excluded, at regional, continental and even linguistic levels. Is it just coincidence – or pure bad luck – that Dominican art doesn't 'exist,' even in relation to Haiti. Let's hope that we owe this reality to a curator too distracted or simply too pressed for time, and not to voodoo!

Elizabeth Ferrer, the curator of the

contemporary section of the exhibition "Modern & Contemporary Art of the Dominican Republic" (a paradigm which should be the starting point for anyone concerned with the operational possibilities of decentralizing art), has a more pragmatic version of the facts: "In the 50's, when Latin American art began to obtain international recognition, the Dominican Republic was living under the dictatorship of Trujillo, it was left out and continued being so for the next four decades" (1).

It is no coincidence that four of the five artists included in this show have been chosen to represent Dominican contemporary art under Ferrer's curatorial direction. New York, the most inaccessible art venue, now has one less reason to ignore us.

Invested in a reality that nurtures endless limitations not only materially but also conceptually, artist Tony Capellán insists on recycling the local ideological commonplaces. Capellán's installations are adorned with the gracious sounds of contemporary "Esperanto" and of "Dominican," two parallel languages which coexist in a sea of radiant contradiction. His personal urge to introduce a conceptual art of flame trees and beautiful "morenas," is by no means detrimental to his work's universal reading. (Kate Rowlinson, curator of the Center for the Fine Arts in Miami, made this comment to me while



Marcos Lora Read.

I was showing her some of the catalogs of these artists' work: "What I'm most impressed about, is that they still live in the Dominican Republic.") "The Barrier of Self-Consciousness" is elemental, but very far from neo-primitivism. It is a veritable exercise in the emancipation of intimacy. Formally beautiful and mysterious, this piece was executed in

1996 and is currently on exhibition at the São Paulo Biennial. The installation is a landmark in Capellán's visual paths, a product of his tireless working standards. He is as tireless as Marcos Lora-Read, in his self-assigned role as ambassador ad-honorem of the Dominican contemporary art scene.

It is worth remembering that

Lora-Read's conceptual work is not only favored by the world's first class citizens: the Museo de Arte Moderno of the Dominican Republic (MAM) has four pieces by this artist, as well as two by Belkys Ramírez and one by Tony Capellán. This slight anomaly in the MAM's collection is mostly a result of the acquisition prize system of the National Biennial of Visual Arts, which is the only way this scarcely-financed governmental institution can obtain new work. Last February, I was part of the selection jury for the Biennial in which installation played a significant role for the first time. "...[In the Biennial] non-conformist tendencies, creativity and avant-garde formulas were manifested, most of them against conventional aesthetic rules... [The Biennial] as a whole connects the visual arts in the Dominican Republic with contemporary art." (2)

Along with many of my colleagues, I was very disillusioned with the criteria applied by the awards jury. Tony, Mónica, Jorge and I agreed that it was absolutely imperative that Dominican contemporary artists shouldn't wait any longer to be legitimized by the neo-colonizers. We needed to find a way to put together an itinerant group show that would reflect the fact that: "...the art of the Dominican Republic has reached a level of sophistication that makes it impossible to keep it a secret from the rest of the world." (3)

The real mystic backbone of this traveling exhibit, is the cause and effect



Marcos Lora Read.

of the work of these artists. For example, Jorge Pineda's crocodiles, which stare at the aftermath of an inexplicable disaster; as a result of the connoisseur's lack of information on the extraordinary richness of Dominican art. And it is Pineda who presents local and international art consumers with some very urgent insights on the imminent extinction of priceless species. Birds and crocodiles are as in danger as the local public's critical abilities, which have been permanently boycotted with the overpopulation of aesthetic banality. Such dilemmas find a formal resolution in Pineda's work, which is strongly linked with his ample skill in draftsmanship.

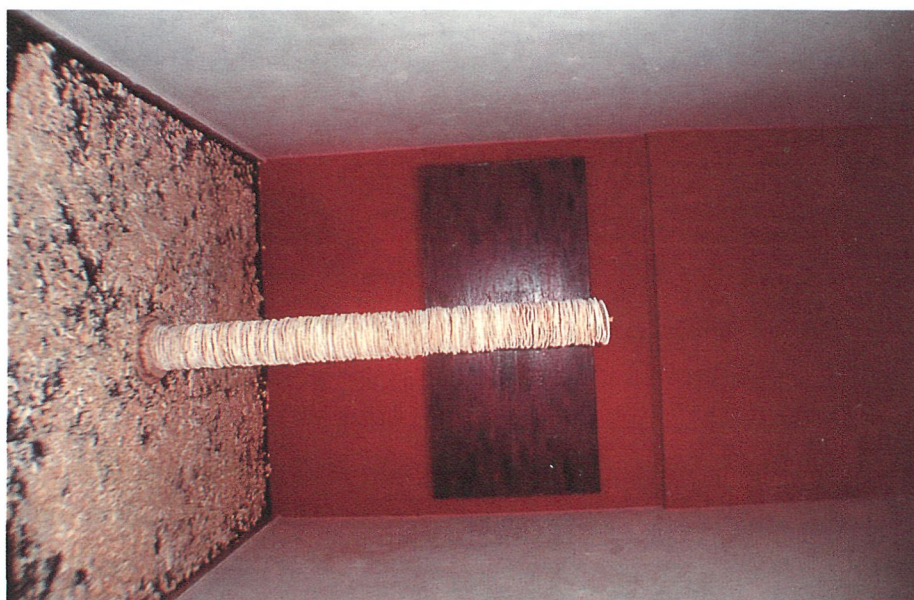
The interaction of their graphic work with the possibilities of installation is a common denominator in the pieces of Jorge Pineda and Belkys Ramirez.

Both artists share a tendency to integrate their iconographic language and the big formats of their print-works in their projects. But because they do it in a modular way, the result is that their installations function with or without the

graphic support of Pineda's epic oars or the prolific xilography of Ramírez.

Feeding the moral debt we owe to Caribbean aboriginal inhabitants (caribes and arawaks), up and coming artist Mónica Ferreras, introduces her "Kassava Obelisque." This deceptively simple piece is constructed out of a very fine conceptual sensibility. The obelisque is destined to become a paradigm of minimalism within the Caribbean installation scene. We welcome this emergent talent in an expedition that is trying to prove that it is possible to send smoke signals through the Internet.

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- [1] "Interview with Elizabeth Ferrer", Alanna Lockward, Suplemento cultural "Ventana", el Listín Diario, 30 Juny 1996, p. 11.
[2] Marianne de Tolentino, *Art-Nexus*, July-September, 1996, p. 102.
[3] Interview with Elizabeth Ferrer.



Mónica Ferreras.