

of as a multicultural platform acting in the European periphery with a clearly different sensibility; it tends to include, tangentially, the African and the Latin American in a tricontinentality that enables it to belong to a virtual and plural community, that isn't exclusively Spanish or national.

In the city of Las Palmas we have a hindu community that is almost one hundred years old, that has maintained its traditions and kept them alive, but that has never really wanted to share them with a society that by day is their client for cheap radiocassettes. Perhaps because they have not produced artists, thinkers, poets, as they are merchants. Commerce can kill anything remotely multicultural. There are floating populations of Coreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, who are posted here to attend their fishing fleets. There is a palestinian community, a jewish one, a moroccan. These different nationalities have their residence permits in order. And then, there are the Africans, who have not settled in the islands, who come and go, legally or illegally, who we watch in the streets selling bad tourist art.

On the plus side of our evaluation we can put the exceptional cultural and historical relation that we have with the Saharai people, an intensely emotional link, who are beyond doubt the africans we best accept. Despite all of this we are not a multiracial society. Why? In part due to the fact that the racial groups and communities in Canarias don't tend to articulate and project cultural messages, nor do they manifest their differences in a intellectual and artistic dimension. This limitation of multicultural dialogue is unhappily compensated by a series of diplomatic cultural initiatives, "weeks of", "the cuisine of...".

Furthermore, the canarians are living through a belated phase of self-definition and self government, that implies the development of decentralization contemplated in our autonomous charter. A great deal of energy is employed in long and difficult state negotiations, and in the drawing up of legal documents and administrative surveys necessary for the creation of organic local, regional laws. All natural conditions theoretically favour a

multicultural flourishing in the islands yet creative energy has been displaced to more pragmatic ends. For the time being, the multicultural is merely another option on the agends of that vaguest of finisecular realities announced in european cultural centres: "cultural plurality".

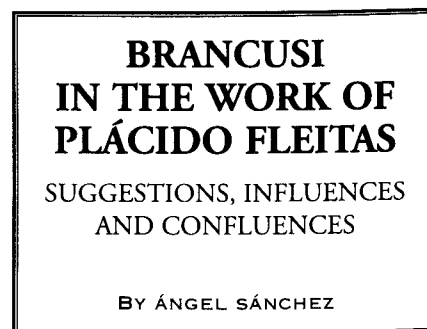
The relation between the islands and the central administration has never been easy, and frequently the historical peripheral marginalism of the islands brought semi-colonial rule. Besides, the geographical and cultural distance of european peripheries breeds strange hierarchies with peculiar tendencies.

Cultural and ethnic difference becomes an obsession, and this creates a certain "identity-mentality" that often ignores other more fertile possibilities of self-definition. Tricontinentality is a paradigm of all the contradictions found in the defense of multiculturalism in our atlantic world. It has a blinkering effect on our idea of the reality of relations between Canarias, Africa and Latin America. They are sporadic, infrequent and belong more to history than to actual time.

One of the major problems lies in our condition of "perpetual colonials", of a society that is submitted to certain markets that force us to produce certain specific goods to the detriment of commercial, economic stability. We lack the stamina and the serenity as a race to open the gates confidently to multiculturalism, for we have been decimated by emigration, the devastating succession of monocultural regimes in agriculture, and now, we are the semi-willing victims of a kind of subliminal colonization enforced by the tourist industry. We are not on equal terms with Europe, and we can't reject certain offers made to us. These determinant forces drastically interrupt any process of self-definition, and generate a syndrome of dispersion. There is an environmental sensibility presently gaining momentum that may be able to redress the balance of tourist trends in favour of greater canarian quality control, yet its effects won't be appreciable till the next century.

Our free evolution towards Africa has been curtailed initially by adherence

to the European Union. We have lived in a culture of moral and spiritual survival, even up to this day, colonized as we still are by multinational economic interests that have created a hybrid tourist culture. Tourists do not come to know us, not even to visit. They buy and consume a vacation package. If we hardly have cultural communication with the germans, scandinavians and english that come to us by millions yearly, how are we going to have it with Africa?



Few of those interested in the local tradition of Canarian twentieth century Fine Arts would doubt the fact that Plácido Fleitas, (1915-1972), should be considered the first abstract sculptor of Canarias, although his abstract sculpture only occupied the last two decades of his life. His chisel had the power, and the pioneer's submission, to perform the journey from classical sculptural volume to the new avant-garde values of imaginary forms.

In an artistic milieu hardly at all devoted to sculpture, and where tradition crowned as great master the figure of the religious image-maker, Luján Pérez, we must acknowledge the fact that Plácido Fleitas had a rough time. Despite the lack of opportunities, of a certain credit that he enjoyed in the mainland, of publicity coverage, and perhaps, owing to the isolation that marked his character, as indeed happens to the archipelago, it has not been easy to establish his reputation as a famous sculptor, having become resigned all of us to accepting him as a peripheral figure. This lack of fame was also something Fleitas assumed, when he

dared to be modern in a conservative world, during the long night of francoist Spain, that only required genre sculptures that we could describe as vertical-trade unionesque, instantly soluble in triviality and oblivion.

Plácido Fleitas never trembled or lost his dignified touch with the chisel. We can consider him to be the great modern sculptor of the twentieth century in the dimension of the canarian world.

However such merit and such excellence don't necessarily lead to national recognition and international glory, which is of course, being known in more than one continent.

Nobody is a sculptor in his homeland, we could say, paraphrasing a similar proverb that denounces a manifest injustice. The appreciation, cataloguing and critical projection of his work is still pending, after the tedious distortions that yesterday's and today's criticism have brought to bear on his concepts, not to say, on his disperse oeuvre, present in European and American collections, it won't be possible to fathom the extent of his inspiration, revealing the universality of his work. This has proved heretofore impossible.

It was no mean feat to get going during the postwar. Obviously the tenerife art magazine "Gaceta de Arte" did not pay attention to that young twenty year old man who held his first exhibition in 1935, in Las Palmas, using a salon that had been decked out as exhibition room right by the Plazuela de las Ranas. Had Gaceta de Arte continued to appear after that fateful 1936, perhaps the editors might have had time to concentrate on the production of that young man who was at the time younger than the most promising stars of the local scene, Oscar Domínguez, the surrealist and Felo Monzón, ("indigenista"), to whom the magazine, or at least Eduardo Westerdahl's eye, did pay some attention. Or maybe not, for we know that Eduardo Westerdahl didn't follow the artistic development of Fleitas's career until 1965, when he was charged with the catalogue of the former's exhibition in the Municipal

Museum of Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

It was perhaps possible also, that Oscar Domínguez himself, who Fleitas visited, took an interest in his work and contacted Westerdahl urging him to consider it, as Fleitas was a shy and introspective man who did not really devote any time to his commercial or critical promotion. Had there been effective interest for his art, Fleitas might well have ranked alongside Hans Arp, Picasso, Angel Ferrant or Joan Miró, who all had photographs and articles on their work published by "Gaceta de Arte".

Putting speculations aside, let us see what really likens Fleitas to Constantin Brancusi, the rumanian sculptor who settled in Paris, and who was already a famed artist in the 1920's; he was an artist who made an enormous contribution to renovating the concept of tridimensionality. That sculpture was liberated from tedious realist verisimilitude owes much to the intuitions and decisive attitudes of Brancusi. Biomorphie rather than anthropomorphic in spirit, Brancusi's is a sculpture of rhythm, of impulses that aim at achieving maximum purity of form. The laconic simplicity of Brancusi's aesthetic form was much appreciated by Fleitas, given the evident similarities between both sculptors' syntax.

That is why Brancusi in Fleitas is a subject awaiting analytical study. The few studies devoted to the canarian sculptor refer to Brancusi only in passing, as a possible influence on that second-epoch, abstract Fleitas. The same sculptor who gives up the figuration of ethnic métissage in the islands, in Tirajana stone, (Grand Canary), and in Tindaya stone, (Fuerteventura), and choses to concentrate on the dynamic evolution of those masterful rhythms that he receives from tradition. He is a sculptor, who, following the materials' cue, searches thought in the grain of the stone. He discovers new, surprising ideas as a result of polishing wood, easily adapting the language of the abstract, as if it were a case of sheer mental affinity.

Some of the critics that have written on Brancusi in relation to Fleitas tend to quote the rumanian's name as just

another influence. (Corredor Matheos, 1964), or if not suggest that such a line of investigation is futile. (Lázaro Santana, 1973). The time has come to determine whether there is indeed something of Brancusi in Fleitas, if the question is easy and perhaps futile, and what did in fact the canarian artist trained in the Escuela Luján Pérez in Las Palmas take from Brancusi during the two years that he lived in Paris. (1951-52). on a grant from the french government.

Accepting that Fleitas was sensitive emotionally and physically to whatever influences he experienced during his parisian stay, can we claim that his leanings were primarily towards the character of Brancusi's work? Can one talk about a differentiated influence that was dominant over other visually identifiable borrowed traits? The answer is yes. An objective comparison manifests that a clearly identifiable area of his work, as from 1952, is evidently brancusian in nature, although we can simultaneously consider it as secondary if we also take into account other contemporary visual referents also present in his work. The proof lies in the victory that Fleitas scores against the void, that central gap in his works, though we may perhaps think that the formal debt to Brancusi is nothing more than a slight family resemblance, or a series of parallel advances, that enable us to discuss Hans Arp, Joan Miró and Henry Moore.

The standardly recognisable Brancusi is almost always a self-enclosed volume, of soft contours and enigmatic severings, where the physical origin sometimes stands out: the synthetic lips of the Negra Rubia, (1926), (Blond Negress) or the archaic, cycladic, -they've been called-, eyes of Mille Pogony, (several versions since 1912), that Mona Lisa of the twentieth century. Brancusi is also the tradition of the plinth and pedestal, with three or four elements on which he places the final piece, as a dish served on a hierarchical surface. Inducing an interaction almost unknown till then, the marble, wood or stone elements signify a theoretical order typically brancusian, that multiple sculptural plinth that contrasts in materials, colour and tactile sensations

with the crown piece. Specialists have seen in this style. "...the most utterly revolutionary way of thinking sculpture, which is an essential characteristic of Brancusi".

We have to imagine Fleitas in one of three collective exhibitions that in Paris and Brussels might have allowed him to study those brancusian pieces that developed the kindred model. Perhaps images sculpted in oak, *La Químera*. (1915), the *Rey de Reyes*. (1935), might have helped him to visualize that ovally perforated plinth at the same theoretical height as the biomorphic head of the mentioned works, when not as model for the stylised base that acts as plinth for *Recién Nacido*. (1926). (Just Born). In this kind of base there is already a strong indication of how Plácido Fleitas is going to evolve.

The formal artistic influences tend to make up two different groups that the sculptor develops in the 1950's: the first in quebracho wood, a hard material that came from the argentinian Chaco and which could be found in the Puerto de la Luz, the port of Las Palmas, among other nutritional imports that Perón sent to the islands by way of post-war cooperation. In figures such as *Gato*, (1952), and its series, the oval half-moon that dominates the sculpture's volume is suggested, crowned with zoomorphic crests and a round central perforation. The elegant curves that Fleitas produces in all the sculptural or pictorial works that date from that epoch, repeat the oval composition in a series of elliptical hollows, with a descending axis of increasing diameter as it progresses outwards, in at least six known works.

Without overlooking in these characteristics a certain influence from Joan Miró, especially in the more Hans Arp-like facial features, we can otherwise safely state that in his physionomies the imprint of Brancusi is decidedly clear. An elliptical style that Fleitas won't abandon, although he will start to smooth out any roughnesses and will model transitional curves that produce streamlined surfaces. This happens with the geomorphical shapes sculpted in sandstone that he made during the 60's, erroneously attributed to the influence of Henry Moore. Such attribution obviates

the slow process of self-definition that marked Fleitas's creative career, and these works are the result of a personal synthesis, of a symbolic economy, that entitle the sculptures of the period to be esteemed as original, and not excessively indebted to Henry Moore. The primacy of the central void or hollow, is a culmination, as Lázaro Santana would say, with dramatic and magical elements, for, "Fleitas is more interested in the hollow as an invisible volume rather than as a void".

Another half dozen works, (the numerical vagueness is just another consequence of the chaos that still surrounds the cataloguing of his work), reinforce the suggestion. Those Sculptures in ebony, (1958), with an oval contour, that punch two symmetrical oval hollows in the piece, running parallel or super-imposed, have a very evident brancusian look about them, as all the work in wood from that period.

The affinities aren't apparently limited to a mere visual comparison of his 50's and 60's series with the pedestals and other parts of Brancusi's sculpture, as we can glimpse from the photographs that the rumanian artist took himself in his studio, which has been carefully restored in the neighbourhood of the Centre Georges Pompidou. Brancusi in Fleitas can also be seen in a broader context of mutual sources of inspiration. Both sculptors were fascinated by primitive Black African sculpture, a fascination that seized many great beginning of the century artists to develop into a vast body of influence later on. There is a brancusian figure of 1914, his Caryatide, hieratic and self-contained, whose spirit Fleitas seems to reproduce in one of his works, the image of an african man whose feet are very reminiscent of Brancusi.

Anyhow, both men refused the label of abstract sculptors. The rumanian artist expressed it like this: "Those who say my works are abstract are stupid, for what they call abstract is realist, for reality is not the exterior form, but the idea, the essence of things." (3). Fleitas also incorporates this idea into his praxis, and there are works by him that endorse the biomorphic theory, beyond

the automatic description of the tract", that will prove so successful in the descriptive field, although conceptually contested. For example, there is a work, (in ebony or quebracho wood?), whose sole graphic testimony is a photograph that shows it in the studio of the Calle Torres, Las Palmas. (1973). It is a volume oval in shape, and with parallel oval hollow inside.

The work endowed with lips, a pair of arms and feet, like two immense fins that prop it up, makes us think that we are beholding a métis fetish of a given canarian ethnic type, that Fleitas had in a previous period popularised, and also certain perceptible african suggestions, emphasized by the black hue of the wood, (an innocent kind of symbol in Fleitas's essentialism).

Undoubtedly Fleitas succumbed to the temptations of influence that certain decisive sculptors of the early twentieth century posed. We have to recognise that these stimuli enabled him to discover morphological realities of nature, already visible in other artists like Hepworth and Nicholson. Let us accept that what is perhaps most brancusian in Fleitas is that "tournant mystique", that he was able to adapt without mimetic harshness. Brancusi, somehow, was within him.



**PEDRO  
GONZÁLEZ**  
IN THE DEEP  
OF THE WOOD

BY CARLOS DÍAZ BERTRANA

The series of paintings that, with the title "The Wood", have been presented by Pedro González in Las Palmas, (Galería Manuel Ojeda), and in Tenerife, (Círculo de Bellas Artes), dispel any lingering doubts as to the function of anecdote in his art: merely irrelevant Whether it is the sea, the wood, an interior, a still life, a portrait or abstraction, the painting of Pedro González adapts the subject to a structural concept of pictorial space.