The Naturally Multicultural Art of Eladio González

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Cover Page Footnote
This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

This about the artist/photographer is available in Diálogo: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol9/iss1/13
"González is an artist of profound "Cubanness" that transcends distances and borders to reaffirm his Antillean and contemporary roots. His command of technique, his mastery of form and the rhythms that are present in his paintings and his sculptures, make him one of the most talented and moving Cuban artists. His works are a feast for the senses and the imagination."

Rogelio Martinez-Furé
Cuban Writer & Curator
Salvador Dali, one of the most imaginative and innovative artists of the 20th century, is reported to have complained “I cannot understand.” Dali once observed, “why man should be capable of so little fantasy.” Too bad Dali didn’t get to know Eladio González, for imagination is what best describes and defines the rich artistic career and production of this prolific artist, master of painting and sculpture.

When I asked Eladio to give me some insight on his creative process, he responded quickly: “its all about el ocio creativo (creative leisure) which requires time, it appears when it wants to…. I don’t set out to paint or sculpt a specific image, I start to work and let my hands follow my subconscious designs.” He has been told that his work is “very sensual, even erotic,” to which he responds “what you see is want you want to see, it is not who I am.” He explains that his work always begins with “lines and color spots” that lead him to the image or composition he is looking for. What comes out loud and clear in all of his pieces is the rich racial and ethnic mixture of heritages that he is: Chinese, African and Spaniard all within the Cuban context that inspires him.

In Eladio’s work one finds a combination of energy and grace that culminate in powerful organic pieces of art. Also, his art can be more spiritual as in the painting Los babalaos me protegen where one is able to see the animal representations in relation to our human experience seeking spiritual significance and harmony. The red color and the action being carried out in the painting symbolize the strength faith gives to the believer to carry on and to live in harmony between the human world and the world of deities.

Eladio has given Chicago his talent and feels that he is a Chicago artist because this is where he fully developed his artistic abilities. He is grateful to his parents and family in Cuba because ‘they gave me my values of honesty, respect and humility for everyone and everything that surrounds us.’

I feel it is important to understand this ocio creativo in relation to his life, his up bringing and his interests. Eladio González was born in the province of Matanzas, in Itabo, Cuba in 1937. His parents gave him mixed ethnicities, Chinese from his father’s side, and African-Spaniard from his mother’s side. He was the youngest of eleven brothers and sisters, and at home he was nurtured by his father in the classics, from books his father’s mother used to buy. Also, his sisters were interested in painting and so his early years were surrounded by literature and brushes.

Regarding formal education he only attended school through the 6th grade, but he studied on his own and in institutes of art including the Academy of Art of San Alejandro, the most prestigious one in Cuba, and from which he graduated with the title of teacher of art and sculpture.

He worked in the workshops of the National Theatre in Havana and at the Tropicana night club where he created the sceneries for the plays and backdrops for the cabaret. By the time he arrived in the U.S., 1968, to Chicago, he was 30 years of age and had his own interests to be executed. He felt ready to be on his own, but this wish took him 16 years to realize. However, after his regular full time work, he would continue developing his own art interests and techniques.

Since the time he arrived in Chicago, in 1968, Eladio has earned several prestigious scholarships, and held numerous exhibitions. For example, in 1972 the Pan-American Council sponsored his first solo exhibit. His work later appeared in the first Latino art exhibit in the Museum of Science and Industry where he received the first prize of the exhibition. He received the Cintas prize for his sculpture El abrazo (the embrace). His work has been exhibited in Miami, New York and Washington, D.C at the Organization of American States. In 1979 he won the Cintas scholarship to study in Paris, France to enhance his training in sculpture. He exhibited in Fine Art 88 in Chicago, and was commissioned to create the statue for Ovation 105 award. González was also commissioned to create the award symbol for The Corporate Partner of the Year and Friends award in 2001.

Age has not slowed the 68 year old artist. On the contrary, he seems to be as active as ever. His artistic production is in great demand and his creative juices are flowing strongly. Earlier this year he finished his personal homage to one of his most admired fellow artist, Wilfredo Lam. The sculpture Homage to Lam (see opposite page) was one of the central features in The Chinese Connection exhibit sponsored by the Chinese consulate of Chicago and held at the Aldo Castillo Gallery. Eladio’s energy and creativity made me realize that what he means by ocio (leisure) is not the regular interpretation of the word, for him ocio is only possible through the intensity of so many activities that generate into creativity, his ocio.
Maria Masud was born in Cruces, Cuba and came to the U.S. as part of Operación Peter Pan (Cuban unaccompanied Children Program) in 1962. She teaches in the Department of Modern Languages and the Latin American and Latino Studies Program at DePaul University. Contact her at mmasud@depaul.edu.

**Latino Chicago Oral History and Latino Archives Project.**

The Center for Latino Research is delighted to have Eladio González join the growing number of participants in its Latino Chicago Oral History and Latino Archives Project. The project is dedicated to documenting and preserving for researchers and future generations, the history and contributions made by individuals and groups to the development of Latino communities in Chicago. The artist has already donated to the Center a large set of documents about his life and career that is currently being processed and catalogued at DePaul's Richardson Library. This article is based on those documents and an interview with the artists conducted by Maria Masud. For more information on the oral history and archives project, please call 773-325-7316, or visit us at: www.depaul.edu/~dialogo