Notes for a face, Virtual exhibition of the work of Luis M. de Jesús Berríos

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I have known my colleague Luis de Jesús for more than 25 years, but I discovered his work about 10 or 12 years ago when he invited me to his house to see his paintings. I was fascinated by his abstract expression of Puerto Rican "reality."

This exhibition is a sample of the artist's perception and understanding of the Puerto Rican reality embodied in art. In **Notes for a Face...** there is not a single face. The expressions of the faces are drawn and blurred on bags or, as we call it in Puerto Rico, brown paper covers. Men are also shown without bags but showing the back of the head with a hair color like that of the bags.

It is unusual that the only painting in which women and children appear is the first, "El Circo." This is what the painter tells us: "The circus is a metaphor that reminds us of doing politics because of its intrigues and theatricality." Politics is a "performance" but not any "performance" but a circus. It reminds me of the refrain of the *Guaracha del Macho Camacho,* written in 1976 by Luis Rafael Sánchez: Life is a phenomenal thing. This vision of the Caribbean world is also expressed by the salsa song *Carnaval*, premiered in 1998 by Celia Cruz. In the Caribbean, the axis of African slavery, life is a phenomenal thing for politicians and a carnival for its inhabitants.

The men dressed in gray suits and ties, except for the clown, hide their faces behind a bag or are on their backs, still inside a "Glass Box". Politics is a matter of men, men masked or with their backs to their observers. Even the transparency of the glass case hides the faces of the accomplices participating in the political circus.

The sea and the festive colors are a constant, placing the artist definitively in the Caribbean. Interestingly, I observe combinations of light and dark in the sea. A sea that, in its most colorful expression, is not as bright as the Caribbean Sea. I see an expression of colors

obscured by shadows and I wonder: is that why the artist paints a lamp in front of a bag in broad daylight?

For me the most interesting "character" is the dog. Obviously a "realengo" dog that passes indifferently or leaves the captured scenes showing the tail and its genitals as a sign of contempt or indifference.

The exhibition begins with a political circus, reminiscent of Puerto Rican politics from the seventies. And it ends with the end of the party ("The Dance of the Hyenas"). I see in this last painting the four participants of the circus and a fifth, which I interpret as the clown now dressed in a black suit and with his back on the floor, without the "sheath" of paper that has also fallen to the floor. The political circus ends in a somber party in front of the sea. There is no longer a tent, no platforms or a finger of a master of ceremonies directing the performance; only men dancing in front of the sea. After all, life in the Caribbean is a carnival and, as Celia Cruz says, "Oh, there's no need to cry, that life is a carnival, it's more beautiful to live singing".

Notes for a Face... is an exhibition that overwhelms my spirit. The artist inserts two paintings with daisies, the flower of innocence, but also a flower of cemeteries. Maybe that's why he paints them in front of the sea, as an offering to the lost innocence. In one of the works yellow daisies frame the view of a house without doors or windows in La Perla, a marginal community that was the gateway to modern Puerto Rico immortalized by Oscar Lewis in his work *La Vida*. In the present time this marginalized community was globalized by the iconic song "Despacito", turned into postmodern fantasy for tourists and "millennials".