



ORGANIZACION DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS  
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SETS #

146 and 147

HECTOR POLEO, ARTIST OF POETRY AND PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

Article and Photographs by Angel Hurtado reprinted from VENEZUELA  
UP-TO-DATE

Caracas, a sky-scrapered, cosmopolitan city of two million inhabitants, still retains neighborhoods that preserve their former character. La Pastora is one of the most typical. People here pride themselves on both their gaily painted houses and their easy-going, old-fashioned ways. On one of its charming blocks, Hector Poleo was born in 1918.

From an early age, his predilection for art was evident. Newspaper illustrations fascinated him and when he was only three years old he began to draw.

At twelve, he entered the School of Fine Arts in Caracas, graduating at nineteen, a master of his craft. Although at this stage of his artistic career, he concentrated on painting urban landscapes, this period was a short one. Even then the human element was foremost in his work. Figure studies made when he was sixteen reflect what was to become the constant preoccupation of his art.

On a study trip to Mexico in 1937, he was particularly attracted by that country's strong muralist movement and studied its techniques at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. In the process, he refined his handling of line, giving birth to a master draftsman, who with but little recourse to shading, can create an illusion of bulk by mere outline.

After his return to Caracas, however, the muralist influence gradually faded. Country folk peopled his canvases, and his mastery of drawing became more and more apparent. "The Three Police Inspectors," perhaps the most important work of this period, still retains a certain Mexican accent.

A fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1947 permitted Poleo an extended stay in New York. The atmosphere of war in the late thirties and early forties and the carnage of those years deeply impressed him. Unexpected presences made themselves felt about him; he was beset by fears, submerged in dreams of despair, and he turned to surrealism.

In a self-portrait painted during this time, the artist imagines himself as blind and senile, blasted by war, withered by age. In the upper left-hand section of the painting, in another self-portrait, he represents himself, by contrast, as a young man. But, even here horrors strike, for the left eye is detached from its socket. This concept, an obsession with Poleo, stems from an accident he suffered



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during his youth, which almost resulted in the loss of an eye. He now wears dark glasses for protection against glare and light.

With the return of peace, Poleo moved from New York to Paris. There he met and married a Venezuelan ceramist, Adela Rico, who had gone to France to study. Since that time she has been not only his constant companion but also the preferred model for his paintings. After four years in Paris, the artist became homesick for his native land, and returned to Venezuela. In 1957, his daughter, Maria Alexandra, was born.

During this period, Poleo also began to feel the need for a radical change. His human figures grew tall and thin, taking on a classic repose reminiscent of the art of ancient Greece. Once again drawing came to the fore. Along with this change of style came another change of residence, as Poleo returned to Paris.

The environment there was favorable to artistic development: new ideas presented challenges to creative talent. The painter found highly stimulating the frequent contact and interchange with critics and other artists in the studios and cafes of Montparnasse.

A breath of poetry is now infused into his work. While his composition is abstract, the human figure insinuates itself, presenting an unexpected visage from time to time. Color, freed from imprisoning outlines, spreads across the canvas in a veritable explosion. The varying tonalities seem to float in space.

#### Poleo on Art

Speaking of his art, Poleo says: "Currently my art might be described as a mixture of fusion of abstraction and elements of the dream world. At the same time, however, I feel myself bound to a form of figural expression which I call 'poetic figuration.' I do not divide painting into categories--figurative, abstract, or what have you. Painting for me is just painting, in the broadest sense of the term. Obviously, there are great conceptual differences between traditional, figurative painting and 'op art' or kinetic art. The latter represents a new way of looking at things. Some say that the older type of painting has ceased to exist and that from an historical viewpoint it no longer has a reason for being. It is foolish to try to impose kinetic art as an absolute dogma, but it is just as foolish to try to deny its existence."



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SET N° 147

HECTOR POLEO, ARTIST OF POETRY AND PEOPLE (II)

- 147-A.- "SELF-PORTRAIT", detail, in a self-portrait of his subrealist period, the artist imagines himself as blind and senile.
- 147-B.- "THE WAR", another canvas of the same period. The carnage of the war is presented as a empty human head covered by a classical mask.
- 147-C.- "HOMELESS" Two women contemplate the destruction of war.
- 147-D.- "THE DEVILS OF YARE". When he abandoned his subrealist period, Poleo painted this canvas of intense color, based on Venezuelan folklore. It is flat in effect, against which, the face on the main figure stands out, by reason of its modeling and appearance of bulk.
- 147-E.-"HEAD". The austerity and rigidity of line dissapears. Little by little, his painting changed from colored drawing to direct composition in color.
- 147-F.-This painting entitled "THE OWL", with its air of unreality, is the product of Poleo's subconscious.
- 147-G.-"LANDSCAPE" The artist commence to work with diluted caseine using the old technique of water-color

147-H.- "FIGURE". Color freed from imprisoning outlines, spreads across the canvas in a veritable explosion. The varying tonalities seem to float in space.

147-I.- "THE WOMAN OF MENTON". A breath of poetry is infused into Poleo's works. While his composition is abstract, the human figure insinuates itself, presenting an unexpected visage from time to time.

147-J.- "COMPOSITION". Multiplication of forms and increased gradations in color led the artist to the idea of converting his compositions into tapestries.





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- 146-A "Portrait of Julieta" - oil, made by the artist at the age of 16, when he was student at the School of Fine Arts in Caracas.
- 146-B "The Capitol" of Caracas, one of the rare urban landscapes painted by Poleo in his early years.
- 146-C "The Church of 'Santa Capilla' (Holy Church)" in Caracas. Another urban landscape, showing in the background the Mount Avila.
- 146-D "Model in a Hammock" - one of the early works of Poleo when he began to study the figure.
- 146-E "Spanish People" - the beginning of Poleo's surrealist period. After his trip to Mexico, his style is influenced by the Mexican muralist movement.
- 146-F "The Three Police Inspectors" (1944). One of the most known and considered by most critics, a masterpiece of this Poleo period.
- 146-G "Portrait of a Woman." This and the three following slides are for one of the best epochs of Poleo when, in New York, he is impressed by the war and his art is at the peak of his career.
- 146-H "And Now What?" This painting by his realism is one of the best examples of the same period.
- 146-I "Without Home." The carnage of the war caused Poleo to turn to surrealism.
- 146-J "Landscape with Eye." Unexpected presences made themselves felt about him; he was beset by fears, submerged in dreams of despair.