

## Don Ricardo Alegría and the Passion for Collecting

The Museo de Las Américas was the last museum organized by Ricardo Alegría, the culmination of a passion for collecting that had accompanied him throughout his life. Between this museum and his first collection of found indigenous objects, when he was a boy on Hacienda Grande, his family's farm in Loíza, there lies an extraordinary trajectory of specialized museums created and/or directed by him.

The desire to preserve valuable objects for a culture is the principal motivation for collecting. But collections of objects in Puerto Rico have a special importance. In a place that has always been ruled over by “prestigious” cultures, empires considered superior, gathering, exhibiting, and explaining the value of autochthonous cultural expressions and contextualizing them within the society to which they belong is a way of documenting an independent existence (however subterranean), an established social order, the consciousness of a nation and of nationhood. It is also a way to write history, discover unknown abilities and circumstances, and propose new paths of research. A collection is, in the last instance, a cultural affirmation.

Ricardo Alegría began his collection of wooden *santos* when those little figures were not the cultural icons they are today. In 1952, the University of Puerto Rico's Museum of History, Anthropology, and Art, under his direction at the time, was the first to present an exhibition of them. Even then don Ricardo recognized the value of creations that testified not just to the beliefs of a community, but also to the technical solutions and original compositions — some of a symbolic nature — used by folk artists to portray sacred figures.

The collection exhibited here reaffirms and carries on his legacy.