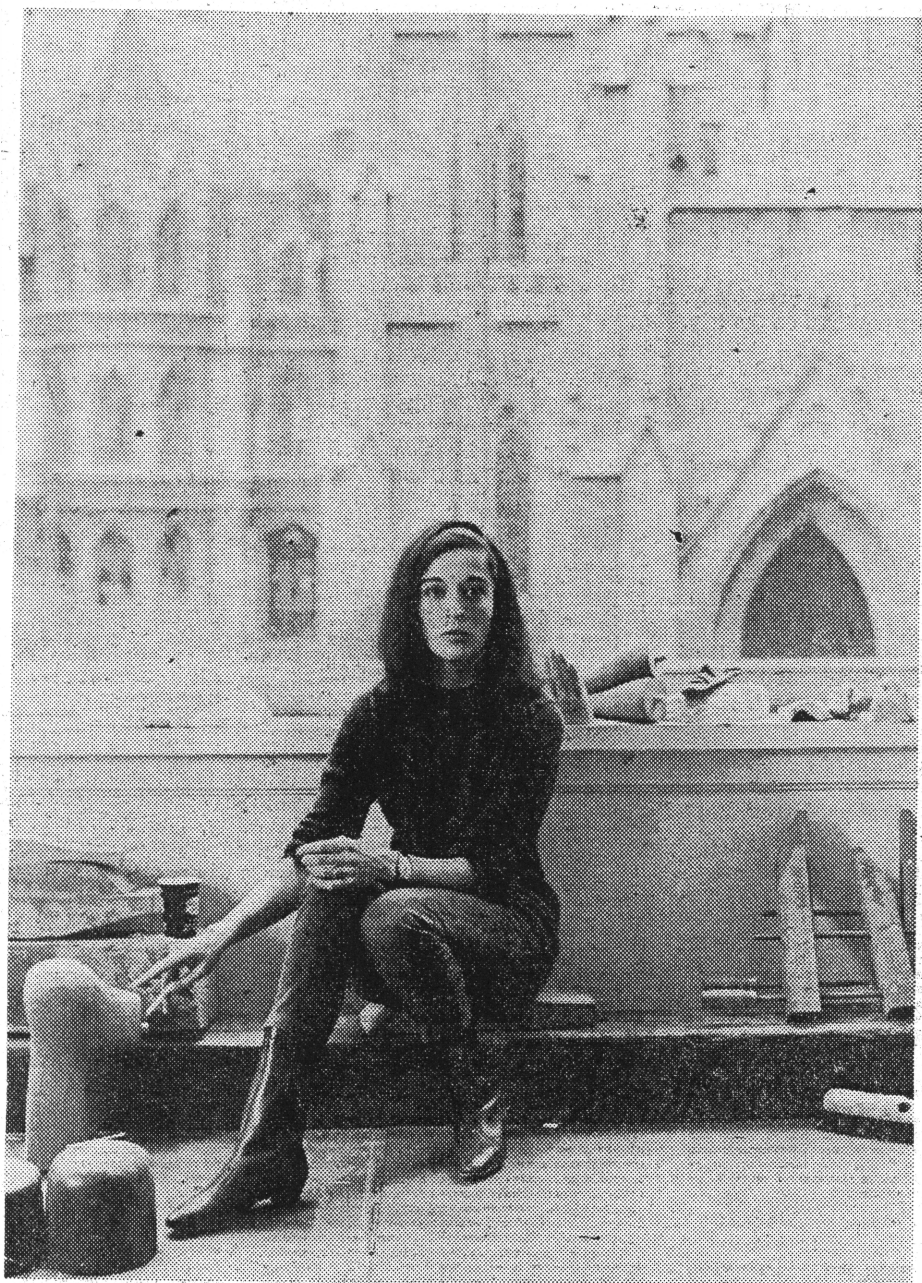


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SCULPTRESS IN HER NEW YORK WORKSHOP—Marisol Escobar, whose statue of Father Damien, chosen for Washington's Statuary Hall, has created a controversy.—Photo by Hans Namuth.

Jean Charlot visits Damien sculptress

By JEAN CHARLOT
Star-Bulletin Art Critic

NEW YORK — Sunday I interviewed Marisol, author of the winning model in the contest for a Father Damien statue to be placed in Statuary Hall in Washington.

I had just received a few clippings containing pros and cons on the issue, culled out of our local newspapers. Perhaps a meeting with Marisol could clarify the matter.

Happily her name was in the telephone book. I phoned her about 10:30 a.m. A young voice, obviously a sleepy one, answered, in an English excellent but unmistakably enriched with Hispanic inflections.

"I live in Honolulu, am passing through New York. There is interest at home in

What people think about the statue.
Story on Page A-2

Letters to the Editor
on Page A-8

knowing more about the winner of the Father Damien contest."

"You mean I won the contest? Nobody told me."

"Then I am glad to be the first one to give you the news. When can I see you?"

"At 5:30 this afternoon."

Her address, near Washington Square, evoked for me memories of 30 years ago, cul-de-sac streets cut out of ancient mews. A few trees would subsist meagerly. Rentals were cheap and heating null, but large windows were a boon to the painters and sculptors who could appreciate the low rent asked for these choice, if poverty-stricken, studios.

Jean Charlot, noted Island artist and the Star-Bulletin's art critic, is returning from a European trip. In New York, he interviewed Marisol Escobar, the famed artist whose controversial Father Damien statue-model has been chosen as Hawaii's selection for Washington's Statuary Hall—subject to approval by the Governor and State Legislature. Charlot himself was one of six other finalists in the sculpture contest whose statues were rejected.

Times change. The address proved to be that of a skyscraper apartment building. Peeking through the revolving door one could admire literally a quarter-mile of red carpet. However, we — myself, my wife and son Martin — did not get the red carpet treatment. Never was I left at running the gauntlet of uniformed doormen, tailored deskmen and switchboard operators.

Who did we wish to see?

Miss Marisol Escobar.

Miss Escobar had left a few minutes ago to walk her dog.

We were somewhat early anyhow. The red carpet led to a red lounge and there we three slumped onto a red sofa, waiting.

People came and went. A tall thin blonde who could have been a clothes model came out of the elevator, a tall thin dog straining at the leash. But this was an outgoing dog, so the girl was not our sculptress.

A few minutes later, in fact on watch time, there came in a lap dog, fluffy and obviously at ease. His mistress, smartly outfitted and booted to brave the brown slush that New Yorkers call a snowfall, was a very pretty brunette, Marisol herself.

"You are the ones from Hawaii. Come up."

We were whisked to the 25th floor. A small apart-

ment cluttered with the sophisticated toys peculiar to the new generation. On the walls, Lichtensteins, newspaper funnies blown to mural scale. Also large size, a photograph of one of Marisol's most reproduced sculptures, "The Family."

An original Marisol, mingling, as is her want, flat polychromy and block sculpture, featured three clowns' heads with glass eyes, with a hand thrust forwards in full relief, holding a china cup.

Stray drawings, one an open hand extended that could have been a chart for palm reading. Another represented a leg topped with a human head.

A giant artificial daisy, dolls seen through half open curtains, just enough space to leave our coats and sit, if one wished, on pop art plastic pillows scattered at random.

Marisol must be an absent-minded artist. The price tag was still hanging from the sweater she wore.

How precisely she matches these unusual surroundings, being herself one of the tastemakers of today.

Though we had just been to Venezuela, her "patria," Marisol chose to conduct the interview in English.

She entered the contest because she liked from the

Turn to Page A-1A, Col. 1

Charlot and sculptress

Continued from Page 1

First the layout of the booklet mailed to potential participants. And Father Damien, as she read about him, seemed to have been such a good man.

What made her decide finally was the fact that this priest understood wood,

it and graciously offers it to me.

What about publishing a photograph of herself? She has one at hand, but, unlike the drawing, she is loath to part with it. I promise to send it back.

The treasured photo shows her, not in her cluttered apartment, but in her work studio, with her beloved scraps and blocks of wood scattered about. A New York church facade in fake Gothic style is seen through the studio window. Nearly shyly she remarks, "That ties up with Father Damien. He was a religious man, you know."

We thank her and, armored anew with mufflers and coats, exit from warm plush to cold slush. New York acquires a tinge of the hick town after our quick dip in Marisol's rarified milieu.

Comments on art

Perhaps she puzzles over the clippings I left with her. Not because dissenters dissent with her art but because their English will raise for her semantic problems. In some quotations, "art" and "arty" are referred to as if they were a dangerously catching sort of smallpox.

Dipping into my memories, I remember that Alexander Calder, his craft in between that of the toymaker and that of the sculptor, managed to spread, first among his friends, and then throughout the world, his own concept of art.

Now an old master of modern art, he has stepped effortlessly from toy crafting to monumentality.

I have not the least doubt that Marisol also can prove herself a long monumental lines. Blown to heroic size, her simple forms are bound to acquire monolithic sturdiness.

And I do not understand those who wish the Damien statue to be a match for what statues are already assembled in Washington's Statuary Hall.

It would be a stark simplification to speak of Statuary Hall as a chamber of horrors. But it is, all in all, perhaps worse than that.

In art the horrible is but a venial sin. The one mortal sin in art is mediocrity.

knew how to make and to build things of wood. She, Marisol, also loves wood.

She intends to make the full-size statue first in wood, before it is cast in bronze in a New York foundry she knows.

Did she have sketches that we could reproduce to show what steps led to the Damien winning model?

No. But she would check.

Leafing through a notebook she stops in unfeigned surprise. Yes, here is a drawing for Damien.

She shows me a quick sketch. In very few lines, the essence of the final version is already stated.

Could we borrow the drawing. Marisol, unhesitatingly, cuts the drawing away from the sketchbook, autographs