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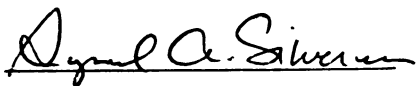
THE MURALS OF JOSE CLEMENTE OROZCO AT THE
HOSPICIO CABANAS INSTITUTE: A
PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE AND THE HISTORICAL
DIALECTIC

presented by

Jeremy Hockett

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M. A. degree in Art History


Major professor

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**THE MURALS OF JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO AT THE HOSPICIO
CABAÑAS INSTITUTE: A PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE
AND THE HISTORICAL DIALECTIC**

By

Jeremy Hockett

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ABSTRACT

THE MURALS OF JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO AT THE HOSPICIO CABAÑAS INSTITUTE: A PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE AND THE HISTORICAL DIALECTIC

By

Jeremy Hockett

The work of José Clemente Orozco, like no other twentieth century artist, displays a comprehensive philosophic system of dialectical thought. The murals of Guadalajara, especially those of the Cabañas Institute, represent a visual treatise of his mature personal philosophy. Little has been done in the scholarship on Orozco to compare the conceptual vision of history and freedom as seen in his work to specific dialectical philosophies, even when an association is explicitly stated.

Orozco articulated in his Cabañas Institute murals a borderlands between art and philosophy, individual and society, past and present. His murals represent a type of philosophical artistry that is transparent and sublime, historic and prophetic, cynical and yet full of hope. This thesis seeks not only to extend fuller recognition to and a deeper understanding of the work undertaken by artist José Clemente Orozco, but to also explore the power of art to reveal, to inspire and to communicate.

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1999

This paper is dedicated to those who seek to make the past a living part of the present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I feel extremely fortunate to have spent seven wonderful years at Michigan State University. In that time I have taken courses that still linger in my thoughts. I want to take this opportunity to thank those faculty members at Michigan State who have left a marked impression on my experience there, for without these exceptional teachers my education would have been much the poorer. I want to sincerely express my gratitude for the three-member committee overseeing this project. I deeply appreciate their instruction, their guidance, and their flexibility. I thank Professor Ray Silverman for his patience and his faith in my somewhat unorthodox approach to this subject. His input and enthusiasm were the most important factors in the successful completion of this thesis. Professor Eldon Van Liere has been a role model and mentor for several years, perhaps unbeknownst to him. His sophisticated sense of humor and personal style made his classes inspiring and unforgettable. To Professor Richard Peterson I owe an immense debt for my personal and intellectual growth. His course on Race and Philosophy was the single most influential class I have had to date.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no truth without a past, and no truth without consequence. History, the story of what and who we are, is a struggle to achieve truth—truth of the past and truth of the moment. History is civilization's most precious possession, the definer peoples and the forge of nations. Bound within the web of time, mankind seeks to discover its own origin, to discover what it is by revealing what it has been, for a people who knows not its history knows not what it truly is, or is to become. With this paper I hope not only to extend fuller recognition to and a deeper understanding of the work undertaken by artist José Clemente Orozco, but to also explore the power of art to reveal, to inspire and to communicate, to discover what Adorno called the “truth content” of art.¹ In addition, I wish to display how philosophy can help to interpret art and penetrate its contextual and causal factors, to discover its universal nature. Adorno believed in the idea of “conceptual mediation,” that:

There is only one way in which aesthetics can hope to understand art today, and that is through critical self-reflection. What art needs is an aesthetics that is able to generate the kind of reflection art is unable to marshal by itself...Only philosophy can find that truth content, and it is here that art and aesthetics converge. On its way to this point, philosophy is engaged not in some external application of philosophical tenets, but in the immanent reflection of works of art...The supreme task of aesthetics is to determine the spiritual essence of individual works of art: in this endeavor aesthetics cannot resort to some concept of spirit lifted ready-made from philosophy.²

¹ Adorno argues that a work of art has its own spiritual essence that can be immanently apprehended through aesthetic reflection, that the work of art endures in its own right distinct from the artist and his intentions. He also argues that such reflection must be rooted in historico-philosophical theory because the apprehension of the spiritual essence of a work of art changes and develops over time.

² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London and Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1983), 468.

The writings of G.F.W. Hegel and Henri Bergson, will be discussed in order to provide a working conceptual vocabulary and the organizing ideas with which to elucidate the relationship of the function, form, and content of Orozco's art to history and progress. The philosophies of Bergson and Hegel can be described as philosophies of freedom, identity, and change. As such, they present detailed and comprehensive comparisons for the murals of Orozco. Although Orozco stated (see Appendix B) that painting "should not connote any theory," the intention of this thesis echoes the words of Salvador Echavarria, who writes,

...to translate Orozco—or any plastic artist—into words, is always a treachery... But it is necessary for a better understanding of the work... This little study has no intention of translating images into words, but only tries to expose Orozco's creative idea. Needless to say that the only thing that matters is the direct contact with the murals. The rest is just mental scaffolds, which have to be removed as soon as they have fulfilled their modest purpose. Deprived of its garments of forms, reduced to the bareness of conceptions, to the shabby dress of words, Orozco's idea shivers. It is necessary to dress it again with images, symbols and allegories. But perhaps the effort to understand it was not useless, and should it succeed, the idea would appear in all its magnificence.³

The work of Orozco bursts forth from a solid personal philosophic formulation. A man of immense experience and erudition, Orozco bore witness to a dialectic struggle of racial proportions played out through the Mexican Revolution. Orozco's vision of the struggle in Mexico envelopes the entire planet in its universal implication and importance. Throughout human history only an exceptional few have harnessed and honed the ability to take in the world around them, mediate this reality within themselves and let it then flow from the mind back into the world of things, transformed by the human spirit into a unique portrait of reality. Orozco's is a vision that yet today resonates

³Salvador Echavarria, *Orozco, Hospicio Cabanas* (Guadalajara: Jalisco en el Arte, Jose Rogelio Alvarez, 1959), 10.

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and persists in the minds of viewers because of its universal nature. My discussion will begin with an analysis of Orozco's most impressive fresco series in the Cabañas Institute of Guadalajara, Mexico followed by a biographical investigation of his life and work.

As Orozco's art is mediated by his philosophy, it is imperative to consider what makes the mind of the artist capable of producing works which unify the particular with the universal, which express the universal will of mankind to improve and the consequences of that will. In the analysis of Orozco and his works, one must be fully prepared to delve into the man--into the history of his time, his nation and his art--if one is to understand the seemingly obscure, but rich messages they contain. All of these aspects have something to teach us, something to contribute to the further understanding of the whole.

Using Hegel's *Philosophy of History* to form an analogous impression of the underlying ideas of both men I hope to shed light on Orozco's shadowy and distorted artistic contribution. Because his murals are philosophically derived they reflect both the historic development of the *mestizo* identity and the immediate demand on the individual to act. Orozco builds up a unifying theme of eternal conflict between the outer social condition and the inner struggle to reconcile the relationship of oneself to it. To address these concepts I have chosen also to utilize the philosophy of Henri Bergson in order to further explain what Orozco's murals convey.

The murals Orozco painted at the hospice are a grand historic narrative, a chronology of the *mestizo* existential crisis in which it is overcome by a philosophy of individual will asserting itself through self-consciousness and renewal. He maintains the integrity of the Classical tradition imported from Spain while addressing directly the

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condition of modern humanity and simultaneously presents to the modern world--where the sacred and the profane mingle incessantly--a philosophic response to the existential ambiguity confounding modern man. His murals represent a new stage in the narrative tradition, extending from the murals of the Renaissance to the canvases of the French Republic, to the English romantic landscape painters, but infused with modern consciousness and clarity. This new modern consciousness equates to, and is in a real way, the product of a new era of human existence, one in which we are potentially no longer trapped by the immediacy or tradition of our world. Justino Fernandez, who wrote extensively on the life and works of Orozco, provides this characterization,

Orozco is the one who sees modern times with full conscience, fully, for neither is he saint with eyes on the past, nor unsatisfied, nor does he swear by a possible or impossible further beyond; but decides to be consumed by fire here, in the reality of what this is as well as in the very fire of his own creative activity.⁴

Certain elements of Orozco's work, especially his murals, are impossible to ignore. Themes of Mexican history--of revolution, fire and catharsis, violence and misery permeate every work--were fashioned by this master dialectician to expose hypocrisy, the paradox and the polarity perpetuating human suffering. His work is ironic in this sense precisely because it was mirroring the reality around him, not because he was himself confused or self-contradictory, as is often stated. As an artist and dialectician, Orozco sought to reconcile this duplicity of existence. Scholar Desmond Rochfort explains that:

In his examination of freedom as an ideal in his work, Orozco expressed himself in ways which many found to say the least, contradictory, but the contradictions are dialectical and calculated.⁵

⁴Justino Fernandez, "Orozco, Genius of America," *College Art Journal* (Winter, 1949-50): 147.

⁵Desmond Rochfort, "A Terrible Beauty: Orozco's Murals in Guadalajara 1936-1939," in *Orozco! 1883-1949* (Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1980), 74.

Alma Reed writes in *Orozco*,

The apparent contradictions in some of Orozco's spoken and written statements in regard to his ideologic motivations were seldom due to confusion or moodiness. They were more often the result of his rare integrity, his complete intellectual honesty. From beginning to end, as has been well said, he reserved the right to erect and destroy his own platforms. His evaluation of persons, events, and ideas was determined solely by the immediate promptings of his own *intuitive* [emphasis mine] faculties—never by fixed standards of partisan politics or the rigid concepts of orthodox creeds.⁶

We, as products and producers of our world, fight an inner and outer battle struggling to achieve an awareness of our *selves* in relation to those things that provide the acknowledgement of our conscious existence and a basis for growth and elaboration, i.e. other beings and our phenomenal environment. No one has so eloquently described the life and work of Orozco as has scholar Justino Fernandez. It seems no one has put forth so much effort to articulate the more sublime ideas encoded in the painting of Orozco. In a eulogizing homage shortly after Orozco's death in 1949, Fernandez wrote,

However, in the presence of the death of a genius, there can be no wailing; we must keep watch in the hushed silence of our inner self, out of respect for our great friend, the man who really leaves an empty space. The greatness of his work will not let the spirit retreat, but drives it forward without rest. Such was his life, his art, and his example...Rare indeed is genius for rare are the men who achieve its essential yet unstable balance. For some, genius is random force, a divine madness; for others, genius is calmness and serenity, absolute balance attained and lost and reattained. There is no better example of this than that cupola at Guadalajara, within whose compass—essential and limited like all things human—all the possibilities of being are before you, and in its center the greatest possibility of man's greatness, to live, consumed by the fire, a symbol for consciousness.⁷

Fernandez describes Orozco's work as "historico-philosophic mural painting." Much of this paper is devoted to qualifying this statement by establishing to what extent the Cabañas Institute murals constitute a visual representation of a philosophic system.

⁶Alma Reed, *Orozco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 48.

⁷Fernandez, "Orozco, Genius of America," 142.

When I was first introduced to the Cabañas murals in Guadalajara I was struck by the idea of how well the story of Mexico exemplified the dialectical theories of history put forth by German philosopher Friedrich Hegel. I believed then and still believe today that art works and philosophy are incomplete in themselves. It is difficult to find in world tradition philosophy or ideology (I include religion as a form of philosophic thought) standing alone from art. As philosophy is the history of human thought, art is the history of human expression, the former lives through words and the latter through images. One can artificially compartmentalize and separate them for the sake of study, but it impossible to keep them segregated indefinitely. Ultimately an artwork is the product of an individual who has constructed for him- or her-self a way of looking at the world, of understanding the world. This is essentially what philosophers do, they construct theories which attempt to explain human existence and human action. For the individual a personal philosophy of life, conscious or unconscious, is to a greater or lesser extent a required act of living.

The philosophy of every individual is unique, as even the most orthodox and ardent Christians will have varying interpretations of scripture. In the same way that we might distinguish, for example, the philosophies of St. Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon by first understanding their common origins in Christian doctrine, we might likewise compare the world of personal secular philosophies, as in those of Orozco and Hegel, to establish a deeper understanding of each by first finding a source of common ground. Through the works of Friedrich Hegel and Henri Bergson Orozco's murals might be seen as a visual philosophic treatise. They represent the accumulated knowledge, experience, and wisdom of one man developed into a system of imagery that expresses an individual

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life philosophy derived from the particular events of Mexican history. Insofar as Orozco's work is philosophically conceived, a comparison between his ideas and the ideas of other philosophers is necessary. I have chosen to focus on the work of Hegel for its dialectical process of history and of Bergson for its metaphysical and spiritual theories concerning the dichotomy between intellect and intuition in the human mind. Because Orozco offers little by way of interpretation for his work I feel it is necessary to have a reference in written philosophy to more fully explain what his paintings might convey to us today. I present these philosophic ideas as a vehicle toward better understanding the mind of the artist, for to analyze the surface meanings of Orozco's murals leaves their richer aspects in a cloud of darkness, and it is in this darkness that Orozco might seem apocalyptic, pessimistic, bitter, laconic or contradictory.

Orozco's reputation has suffered under the stigma of such accusations. His influence and importance on twentieth-century art has yet to be adequately acknowledged or investigated. He remains a figure of obscurity, a master awaiting recognition and interpretation. This thesis is but one minor attempt at reviving interest in a grand tradition of the Americas, the public mural, and one of the movement's titans, José Clemente Orozco.

Chapter 1

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The task of tracing the impact and influence of José Clemente Orozco on Western art history, as well as the sources from which he drew his vision, has remained largely untouched by scholars outside of Mexico. Much of the literature dealing with the art and life of Orozco is in Spanish. However, due to my limited knowledge of the Spanish language, I have relied only on those sources written in English. Fortunately, a number of the critical writings of several important scholars who have written on Orozco have been translated into English.

Two writers in particular have provided inspirational confirmation as to the philosophic basis of Orozco's work. Justino Fernandez and Octavio Paz, in brief but exceptionally insightful essays, offer a deeper look into Orozco the man and his underlying ideas, his sincerity and authenticity. In his *Essays on Mexican Art* (1986), Octavio Paz has written an enlightening piece on the Mexican Muralist Movement, highlighting its origin and the key players in its development, particularly Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. It is an especially articulate description of the differences that distinguish the *Tres Grandes*, their philosophies and their art. Another book by Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* explores the development of the Mexican psyche, and is a seminal work in the understanding of Mexican character and identity.

Although the majority of the Orozco literature is in Spanish, two important issues of the journal series *Jalisco en el Arte* focussed on the artist, one by Salvador Echavarria and the other by Justino Fernandez, were published in both English and Spanish. Each was highly informative and helpful in organizing an interpretation of Orozco's philosophical imagery. In 1983, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Orozco's birth, the Cabañas Cultural Institute published a book of his works called *J. C. Orozco*. It includes two introductory essays by Luis Cardoza y Aragón and Teresa del Conde, both noted Orozco scholars who have written extensively on various aspects of the artist's life. Three concurrent chronologies of Orozco's life, of Mexico and of world events during his lifetime are appended at the end of this book. The Orozco chronology has been reproduced in Appendix C of this thesis.

Several works in English are devoted to the *Tres Grandes*, Orozco, Siqueiros and Rivera, notably those of MacKinley Helm, *Modern Mexican Painters* (1941), and Bernard Myers, *Mexican Painting in Our Time* (1956). Helm's *Man of Fire: J. C. Orozco* (1953) and Myers' *José Clemente Orozco* (1960) also present apt, but traditional art historical perspectives, tracing Orozco's life and artistic development juxtaposed with that of Rivera and Siqueiros. And although both give cursory treatment to its historico-philosophic aspects, neither explores the relationship between Orozco's work and specific philosophies.

Artist Jean Charlot, a French ex-patriot living in Mexico, corresponded with Orozco while he was in the U. S. for several years before traveling to New York himself in October, 1929. The letters written by Orozco during the first two years of his stay yield important insights chronicling his frame of mind, his experiences, and his

interaction with those of the New York intelligentsia. Ruth L. C. Simms translated and reprinted these letters in 1974 in the book *The Artist in New York* along with a foreword by Charlot and three previously unpublished writings by Orozco.

A 1993 master's thesis by Adam David Wilensky, *Orozco's Conception of Prometheus as Redeemer of Humanity*, follows the steps leading up to Orozco's Pomona College fresco, *Prometheus* especially through his contact with "the Ashram" and Delphic Studios, where discussions of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* inspired its subject. Shifra Goldman, in her 1977 book *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*, and Wilensky both speak of a relationship between Nietzsche and Orozco's art, however, no English texts have been found which relate the visual philosophy of Orozco extensively to that of any Western dialectical philosopher. Hegel, in particular, is rarely if ever mentioned in regard to Orozco's work, although it is nearly always discussed to various degrees as dialectical painting.

In 1980 a collection of essays accompanied an exhibit at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art. It is a seminal resource documenting the man and his work. In it contributors David Elliot and Desmond Rochfort each emphasize the dialectical nature of Orozco's work at the San Ildefonso Preparatory School murals in Mexico City and Guadalajara cycle respectively. Another essay by Olav Munzberg and Micheal Nungesser looks at Orozco's first murals at the Preparatory School and their reworking, which is central in the understanding of Orozco's transition from graphic artist to muralist. And Laurence Hurlburt analyzes the work of Orozco while in New York. Hurlburt is also the author of *The Mexican Muralists in the United States*, published in 1991. Taken as a whole it represents a long overdue compendium of an under-esteemed

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American master. Several of Orozco's most important writings are also here reprinted. A triple chronology, like that of the 1983 Cabañas Institute publication, is also included, however there are some minor discrepancies in certain event dates.⁸ I have chosen to append the 1983 timeline, which is the most recent and comprehensive of the two.

An article written in 1992 by scholar Stephen Polcari presents a definitive argument linking the work of Jackson Pollack to Orozco's. It also serves as a model for the type of stylistic investigation of Orozco's influence that seems to be lacking in studies of his artistic achievement and formidable sway on later artists. This is the only article that focuses exclusively on the direct affect of Orozco's work on another artist outside Mexico. In so doing Polcari helps to articulate the intensive interaction between artists of Mexico and the United States during the thirties and forties, in particular between Orozco and Thomas Hart Benton, one of Pollack's teachers.

Of course, Alma Reed's 1956 biography *Orozco* and Orozco's own modest *Autobiography* provide a necessary basis for understanding the underlying philosophical development of his work. Reed also authored the 1932 introduction to the artist, with her book *José Clemente Orozco*. Although Alma Reed's biography has been characterized for its sentimental bias, her important documentation of Orozco in New York can hardly be disregarded or avoided.

We know much about the character and veracity of Orozco the man and artist, that Orozco was keenly adept at harnessing the sublime and mysterious power of art, a power he consciously wielded, weaving it discreetly into the fabric of his murals. The universality of his vision is embedded philosophically into these images and bears

⁸For example, the Oxford timeline gives 1911 as the year Orozco's father died, while Cabañas publication lists 1907 as the year.

heavily on present conceptions of freedom, truth, justice, and self-consciousness. This thesis explores the connection between aesthetics and philosophy in the art of an exceptional man. Orozco's works reveal a man shaped by his experience, and reveal a man personally liberated through the very process of expressing it on the walls of Mexico.

Chapter 2

THE MURALS OF THE HOSPICIO CABAÑAS INSTITUTE

The walls and ceilings of the *Hospicio Cabañas* (Fig. 1) thematically depict the images of the Conquest. They are primarily concerned with the Spanish imagery of Cortés, the Conquistadors, and the mission of conversion undertaken by the Catholic Church, specifically the Franciscan friars. It is furthermore a portrait of Western Despotism, its force, its genius and most importantly, its destructive and inherently oppressive nature. Graphic and penetrating, this series illustrates to humanity the undeniable evidence of the tyranny of the Spanish, the unsavory aspects of indigenous tradition, and of the nature of mankind. This is, however, done not for the sake of condemnation, but for parity, to show there is no single source of blame for Mexico's troubles. It serves as a foil for expressing the positive potential of *mestizos* to overcome the hatred and divisiveness of the past. Orozco's murals plead for reason and rationality to intervene, with self-consciousness finally halting the cycle of human self-destruction.

Many of the panels are arranged in thematic series and will therefore be most easily discussed together as such. The themes of pre-Columbian Mexico, the Conversion, the Conquest, the Revolution, and Resolution are the order of discussion for this analysis.

The Conquest and Conversion: A Master/Slave Dialectic

One last great structure remained to be painted as Orozco returned from his successes in the United States in 1936. The city of Guadalajara asked Orozco, the “son of Jalisco,” to decorate perhaps its finest chapel, designed by Mexico’s greatest Neo-Classical architect, Manuel Tolsa. Buildings of Tolsa’s design are found in Mexico City and other major Mexican cities. Tolsa had been sent to Mexico by the Spanish king Carlos III to aid in the establishment of an art academy that opened in 1785, later renamed San Carlos Fine Arts Academy. His official duty and likewise the purpose of the academy, was to bring the recently adopted court style of Italian neo-classicism to New World artists, the style that would dominate the academy in Mexico City until the first decade of the twentieth century. Work was interrupted by the 1810 Revolution and finally completed in 1845 under architect Manuel Gómez Ibarra, who designed the chapel’s dome.

The chapel originally served the *Hospicio de Ninos* built under the patronage of Father Juan Cruz Ruiz de Cabañas and sits in the center courtyard of the complex. When Orozco painted there, the hospice had been turned into a state-run orphanage during the anti-clerical post-Revolution years; its chapel was de-consecrated and intended as a reading room and library for the orphaned children. When Helm discusses this mural in his book on Orozco, he laments that the artist simply forgot the audience he was painting for, that he had ignored in some way the function the chapel served. Children were actually banned from seeing the images for decades after the murals’ completion, as they were deemed too frightening. However, the function of Orozco’s art is perfectly adapted to the function of an orphanage; it is, after all, the story of orphans, the orphaned *mestizos*

of Mexico. Salvador Echavarria on the other hand sees things differently than Helm, he writes,

The Chapel of the Cabañas Hospice is a symphony, the symphony of the History of Mexico. In the same way that Tolstoy wrote tales for the children, Orozco abandons here his crude bold realism to talk to the little orphans, in the House of Mercy. His expression becomes simple and clear, as is the case when adults tell fairy tales. The history he relates is also meant for adults, and is terrible. And unfortunately, there is no happy end, as in all fairy tales.⁹

Octavio Paz has stated that, Orozco's work, though ostensibly "public art", is a personal vision. It did not speak for the popular sentiment but in many ways spoke out against it. So we may forgive the often "adult" content of his works, and understand why they have always been plagued with controversy.¹⁰

As one enters the hospice the viewer is met in each end of the transept of Manuel Tolsa's Neo-Classical structure with representations of the indigenous Aztec religion. Four scenes set in four arches made by two vaults convey visually that the *El Mundo Indigena*, "The Indigenous World" (Fig. 2), is not a world that any modern-day Mexican would wish a return to. Ritual dance and human sacrifice, justified by tradition, render the idealized Indian past impotent. This is not a denigration of this heritage, however. Orozco is merely exposing a reality that was brutal, and equally as barbaric as the period of Conquest, yet important and necessary for development of a *mestizo* identity. The Mesoamerican world was not liberated by reason. Rather, it was based upon an incomplete human identity which was built upon a religious system that placed human existence a step below the gods they themselves had created; they became victims of their

⁹Echavarria, *Orozco, Hospicio Cabanas*, 12.

¹⁰Public controversy of some form or another surrounded many of Orozco's major murals, beginning with those at San Ildefonso. The murals produced in the U. S. were variously attacked because he was Mexican or because of their perceived negativity. This fact lends to his authentic artistic nature in contrast to the pleasing and amiable images produced by Rivera, which rarely caused negative reactions in Mexico and were only seen as controversial in the U.S. because of the anti-Communist atmosphere of the times.

own ideological demons. This is contrasted starkly by the one-sided images Rivera created of indigenous virtue in his murals at the Government Palace in Mexico City.

In the first vault we see an image of the mother deity “She of the Serpent Skirt” (Fig. 3), *Coatlique*, in whose name countless were killed. The image closely resembles the statue that once stood atop the *Templo Mayor* (The Great Pyramid) of Tenochtitlan in the modern-day center of Mexico City. When the statue was first found it was glistening with the blood of recent sacrifices. Unearthed in 1803 by Baron Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt, it had been buried by Franciscan priests during the Conquest to save it from certain destruction. *Coatlique* holds the implements of war, a bow and arrow, and wears around her neck the trophy necklace of hearts taken from the breasts of still living victims. For the sake of appeasing a god of their own imagination, villages were plundered, even wars waged--as with so-called Flowery Wars--in the search for fresh life to be taken at a sacrificial slaughter.

No less absurd is the fallacy of Christianity, which, in the name of Jesus, justified the oppression and systematic destruction of an entire culture, robbing its riches, dismantling its institutions, and murdering its people. The next series of frescoes depicts in haunting images the facade of the Catholic Church as an instrument of the Conquest. Orozco reveals the contradiction in a religion that preaches humility, equality of all people in the sight of God, and self-sacrifice while simultaneously being used to legitimize the vitiation of the indigenous identity.

Three scenes of evangelization depict the spiritual conquest of the *Indios*. The two smaller images mirror one another in composition and in message. In each is seen a standing (or kneeling), hooded monk, hands clasped, eyes and face turned to the floor in



prayer and sympathy. Lying on the floor next to the priest is a nude, dark, faceless figure; one still and flat, the other seems to writhe and struggle as if having a tortured nightmare. His face is agonized and distorted in mental anguish, having been stripped of his cultural identity. The irony is that as these men of God pray for the pagan savages, they seem completely unaware that they themselves, as instruments of the Conquest, torment and shred the very souls they intend to save.

On the ceiling of the nave is painted the third picture of the conversion campaign. Here again stands the monk (Fig. 4), a Franciscan, towering above a dark, nude, kneeling figure who holds his hands to his face which is completely hidden from view, the gesture of a helpless, hopeless submission. In the right hand of the priest is a large cross that seems to be made of four sword blades. This is contrasted with the left hand blessing the Indian, suggesting the conversion was not one in which the people's hearts were simply won over by the gentleness and persuasion of the Christian doctrine. They took the only choice left to them under threat of alienation, violence and brutality to find their sole spiritual haven against the destructive nature of the newly imposed tyrannical order within the confines of the Catholic Church. Positioned horizontally above the Franciscan, a mechanized, armored angel hovers while holding in her hands a cloth with "a b c d" written on it, symbolic of the Catholic church's dual role as educator and vanquisher of the spirit. As we will see with Cortés, it is the machine that is in control, the mechanical intellect, the machine of war, commerce, and conquest. It is technology and industry that have governed the swift pace towards modern life, not the words of Christ. Man is but an unaware collaborator, ideologically intoxicated by the process of industrial progression. Just as *Coatlíque* ostensibly dictates the actions of the Aztecs, a

cult of industry drives Western civilization, like a team of draft horses, down a bloody unknown trail, a civilization so technologically obsessed even their angels are armored. It is not the promise of missionary salvation, but the machinery of imperialism that is ultimately responsible for justification of the conquest.

The culmination of this series is “The Confusion of Religions” (Fig. 5) which faces *Coatlíque*, in the opposite end of the transept. Orozco has imagined a stele, an amalgamation, made of fused icons from Indigenous and Catholic faith. At the center of the composition is a human torso from which extend arms and legs, into the corners of the vault, forming an ‘X’. He seems to seethe in a churning cauldron of religious ambiguity. The varied religious imagery appear to be crudely interlaced by a series with wire mesh revealing a monstrosity, a freakish Frankenstein monster of artificially connected limbs and parts sewn together in an attempt to hide its hideous origin. It describes the emotional and psychic struggle to rewire and rebuild the connections between the mind and body, to link sensation with the mind in a desperate mental effort to re-affirm the self in an alien world. Lying crushed under the weight of the massive stele one can discern the leg of an Indian which seems to have been stripped of its skin exposing raw bone, muscle and tendon. This same treatment was given to the images of “The Indigenous World.” I believe that Orozco may be referring these images to the ritual flaying of skin in Mesoamerica, which was then worn by a priest and left to rot away from the body in a symbolic gesture of rebirth. The fleshless bodies represent the assimilation of the indigenous world, its outer world consumed by the imposition of Spanish culture. Thus, the body in the center is the *mestizo* emerging anew from the heat of forced transition. That world is impossible to return to; it cannot again exist because

what it was has been engulfed, merged into a now monolithic synthesis awaiting realization.

Directly opposite *Le Evangelizacion de America* stands the emblem of the physical conquest of Mexico, Hernan Cortés (Fig. 6). In *La Conquista de America*, Cortés is a monumental cyborg, part man, part machine. He looms over a scene of bloody carnage in which we see hacked off body parts strewn about as if freshly-mowed grass. His features are strong and proud, his gaze determined, resolved and cold. He seems very aware of his role in history as the leader of an invasion of grave implication, yet he seems completely ignorant of the dark influential presence above. Another false angel, as seen in the image of the Franciscan, wraps an arm around his neck and whispers in his ear, dictating his actions wholly by filling his ego with ideas of immortality. Orozco painted his torso as an empty dark hole, with no heart, no mercy, no sympathy, a mere instrument of despotism, blinded by that ideology of imperialism and seemingly completely ignorant of his Christian religious philosophy.

La Belicosidad (Fig. 7), known as “Conquistadors Fighting Amongst Themselves,” also on the vaulted nave, depicts the soldiers commanded by Cortés as a mass of swords, helmets and out-stretched arms moving, as one destructive juggernaut bent on the annihilation of everything that lies in its path; a murderous bulk of armament against which the Aztecs had no hope. These scenes serve to show the viewer the overwhelming military superiority of the Spanish military over the severely outmatched Aztecs and the haphazard and indiscriminate deployment of violence they perpetrated. Seeing the balance of physical might as unquestioningly resting on the side of the Conquistadors, Orozco remarks upon savagery heightened to a demonic level by the

gross disparity. This is the same idea one observes directly in the next panel called *Los Caballos en la Conquista*.

The Spanish Conquest spread swiftly across Mesoamerica, like the Black Death of Europe, but carried on the backs of horses rather than rats. Orozco regarded the horse as key to the successful Spanish invasion. The next images are, I believe, clearly taken from medieval plague paintings of Europe. The artist and teacher at the San Carlos Academy, Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), had been a great admirer of Italian fresco and extolled its virtue as a medium to his students at the Academy before the outbreak of the Revolution. Although I have found no direct evidence that Orozco studied these particular murals, we know that he sought to learn everything he could about the art of fresco, including studies of European fresco masters. Certainly Orozco could have seen reproductions of either Baffelmacco's frescoes in the *Camposanto* at Pisa or those of the *Palazzo Sclafani* at Palermo while studying at San Carlos or witnessed them first hand while visiting Italy. Orozco saw the horse as the defining factor in Spain's easily won victory over the Aztecs and other peoples of Mesoamerica and chose the defining symbol of European domination to relate its impact and intensity. Helm believed:

Of all the elements of European culture introduced by the Spaniards to Mexico, horses had seemed to Orozco the most picturesque and steel the most frightful, and as an imaginative student of Mexican history, he was able to make of horseflesh and metal some of the most striking particulars of his mural conceptions.¹¹

Los Caballos (Fig. 8) is translated as "The Horses." A Conquistador takes up the central focus of this painting, riding a two-headed horse. He holds a sword that points to the pile of human parts below him. Flanking the central figure on the right is another

horse and rider striding across dead, dismembered bodies. The viewer senses the sweep of the rider's sword flailing effortlessly through the flesh of the relatively unarmed and naked victims, their bodies falling heavily to the blood saturated earth. The other end of this vault, left of the central horseman, presents a mechanized soldier who has pounced upon a naked figure, crushing the pelvis with bent knee and strangling the Indians neck with his mechanical hands. The helpless martyr, dying in heroic defense of his people and his culture, can only stretch his arms toward the sky in a futile defensive gesture.

Los Caballos is meant to underscore the clear advantage of the Spanish might. In doing so, Orozco reveals an elevated, sadistic brutality on the part of the Conquistadors, who must have been keenly aware of their superiority. The double-headed horse may also allude to the dual nature of the word *caballo* meaning a “stupid or brutal person” in American Spanish. Similar assertions relating to language-in-image have been made about two panels of the later murals he painted at Jiquilpan (1940). Helm parenthetically refers to this in his book *Man of Fire*. He asserts that in “calling those twin panels *La Masa*, Orozco has been suspected of double-entendre, for *masa* means dough as well as crowd, and the masses of Mexicans, drawn with gaping mouths instead of heads on their shoulders, are being offered stones for food in place of the bread they require.”¹²

Although I do not agree with the interpretation, I do believe Orozco employed a double-entendre, but referring to both “dough” and the “masses” in the sense that the masses are easily manipulated and moldable. It seems more likely that having mouths instead of heads refers to the fact that no one was listening, nor was anyone using their brain, but everyone had something to say.

¹¹MacKinley Helm, *Man of Fire, J.C. Orozco* (Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York, NY, 1953), 25.

In one last portrait of the Conquest, one of the strongest images at the Cabañas Institute, Orozco once again employs the dramatic effect of pitting machines against humans in the panel of *La Espana de Carlos V*, also known as the “Mechanized Horse” (Fig. 9). Carlos Merida has described this image as a “war-tank.” Likewise, Desmond Rochfort asserts that the image “creates a visual metaphor for the conquistadorial horse as a modern battle tank. Upon its grotesquely mechanical back and body appears, in a banner, the image of the heraldic lion and tower of *Castile*. Its position is precisely that of a battle tank turret.”¹³ The association made between this image and the coming of the “Age of Machines” is an appropriate one, however I do not believe it represents a tank. A tank by definition does not ride on rails. Racing across the scene, resembling more a locomotive than a horse, a Conquistador is fastened to his steed forming a single mechanical unit running on two I-beam rails. The “iron-horse” is fitted with gears, hoses and chains; chains that in fact seem to be spilling out of its underbelly leaving a trail of bondage in its wake. Its legs function not as propulsion but instead as mechanical pincers, like wickedly hooked talons. The rider holds a huge flag with a Spanish crest in his left hand, and extends a sword from his right which acts as a plow blade ready to rip a furrow through the field of Aztecs before him.

I would like to offer an alternative interpretation to those of Merida and Rochfort that implies a deeper meaning, relating to both the past and future. This image closely resembles a personification of the plague in the fresco panels of the *Sclafani Palace* in Palermo and the “Triumph of Death” of the *Camposanto* in Pisa, by Francesco Traini (Figs. 10, 11), as well as Pieter Brueghal’s “Triumph of Death” (Fig. 12). It appears as if

¹²Ibid., 83.

¹³Rochfort, “A Terrible Beauty,” 86.

Orozco refitted an old motif, brought it up-to-date. Orozco's two *caballos* panels can be seen as symbolically representing both the biological plague brought by the Spanish, but also the ideological diseases of pigmentocracy and blind technological advance, a "triumph of *modern* death."¹⁴ In these images he is able to sum up the overall alliance of forces working against the indigenous population. On another level, these images as a whole give an impression of how the Aztecs perceived the armored Spanish and their horses as they stormed Tenochtitlan like alien monsters, while, with them, he also puts into perspective for the modern-day viewer what a true massacre the Conquest was.

The Conquest series penetrates deeply into the core of Mexican history. These panels are filled with multiple layers of interpretation, as is typical of Orozco's work. Western culture, the machine worshipping technophiles, believing themselves largely emancipated from the dictates of the natural world through their role as "masters," has evolved an ego of extreme proportions. It has so completely occluded itself from the world in which it lives that it no longer has the capacity to feel itself part of the whole. Perceiving itself as elevated above the ostensibly uncivilized and backward peoples they conquer, it justifies the ruthless subjugation and exploitation of the earth and all other cultures as divine fiat, for God has given them these powers as a gift for their devotion and their righteous mission. This idea is exemplified in the panel of "Philip II" (Fig. 13) embracing a huge wooden cross in one hand and clutching a Bible in the other; the crown is separated from Philip's head by the horizontal beam of the cross as if to indemnify his role in Mexico's suffering. He is simply following the divine will of God. These images portray an invasion of armored machines, an invasion of technological superiority guided

¹⁴The Spanish obsession with racial types, as seen in the numerous paintings of the "castes," established a hierarchy of racial superiority, at the top of which were full-blooded Spanish. This has been a source of

by a corrupted religious doctrine at the service of personal greed and self-satisfaction. Many have suggested that these images represent a critique of technology, but within the framework of this paper it is not so simple. It is technology at the service of ideology that is being critiqued; it is the way in which it is employed, and to what end. In her biography on Orozco, Alma Reed relates the artist's response to critics who charged Orozco with attacking the "machine." He responded, she said, that his representation was directed not "against the dynamo, but against man's abject worship of it."¹⁵ Again, this runs in opposition to the view and art of Rivera, who glorified the machine--best exemplified by his mural series at the Detroit Institute of Art--as the catalyst for the material well-being necessary to establish the coming Communist "utopia."

Ideology in the Wake of Revolution

The topic addressed in the next set of frescoes revolves around the myriad of potentialities, both good and bad, stemming from colonialism, the Conquest, and human conflict in general. These paintings reveal what lies in the wake of tyranny as a critique of the imperialistic nature of the West. They all share the theme of human conflict retarding the progress of mankind by perpetuating oppression and poignantly prophesizes the Gulags of Stalin, the concentration camps of Hitler, and the Cold War iron curtain.

"Despotism," "The Militarized Masses," (Fig. 14) and "The Dictators" (Fig. 15) paint a portrait of Western despotism. The first panel depicts a scene of rigid order. Rank and file stretch infinitely into the background under a huge imposing uniformed figure holding a whip, whose head has been purposely severed by the top of the framing arch. The rows of homogenous automatons march as if one solid curtain welded together--

entrenched prejudice ever since.

assembled as so many pieces of machinery, controlled by a “headless” authority. The next scene is nearly the same image, but here Orozco paints the military and ideology necessary to maintain oppressive control over the people. The same rows of mechanized human beings as we saw above, march this time with flags and banners, implements of ideological control and divisive isolation. Barely recognizable as people, their geometric rendering provides stimulating emotional reaction as the awareness of what they are slowly rises in the viewer.

Flags billowing out like sails on a boat, echoing the previous panel, are held by a horizontal band of marching soldiers in the *Los Dictadores* panel. Above them, as if situated on a viewing stand, is a dictator in hieratic scale, posed sternly, head turned up slightly. He is surrounded by a group of generals and military types who seemingly await patiently for their chance at the “crown.” This panel has also been called “The Labor Parade,” in which case we are seeing rows of marching strikers as the labor bosses rally them into partisan bickering. I am inclined towards the first title, however, as with most of Orozco’s images, they have multiple levels of meaning. Although it may depict organized striking workers marching in the streets of Mexico City, the type Rivera could often be seen leading, they also conjure images of Soviet and Nazi military parades.

A common thread runs through all three panels. From scene to scene, along the bottom of each mural, extends a register made up of several strands of barbed wire which serve to prevent any outside or foreign influence from disrupting the state of totalitarianism within, while confining the victims to a life of solitude and subjection. Ideology equals oppression. Oppression of the masses inevitably turns to eventual revolt. The modern world is essentially based upon revolution, not only in the sense of physical

¹⁵Alma Reed, *Orozco*, 100.

uprising, but of a transcendent step of human consciousness that establishes freedom as the supreme goal of our existence.

Orozco saw in the Mexican revolution as much misery, destruction, stupidity, and brutality as ever had come before. Various factions, supposedly striving for a common goal, became caught up in the fervor of war, neglecting their purpose and squandering their united powers for self-interest, losing all sight of their dream. In the middle of it all, the innocent still suffered.

The last set of panels to be treated, before analyzing the theme of resolution in the dome, is another triptych situated opposite the portrait of despotism on the ground floor in the right side of the nave. The central panel represents human suffering, *La Humanidad Doliente* in Spanish. The viewer sees what appears to be the interior of a church housing countless victims of the Mexican past. Huddled together, seated on the floor, resigned to their fate, a lost people awaits a true leader to usher them into a liberated human existence. The flanking companion pieces point out elements that perpetuate the exploitation of the distressed populace.

On the left is *La Caridad*, or “Charity.” Orozco paints a traditional portrait of the benefactor responsible for the construction of the hospice itself, Father Juan Cruz Ruiz de Cabañas. He is, however, also symbolic of the Catholic Church and the negative impact of its “charity,” which only temporarily alleviates suffering, houses it, and in the long run actually sustains an atmosphere in utter opposition to its intent. Charity can often work against those it purports to help by contributing to an image of inferiority and hopelessness sending a message to *mestizos* that they cannot succeed on their own, that they are dependent on the generosity of a Spanish religious institution.

The other factor counterproductive to the fulfillment of the revolution is the disunity of the leaders. In *Los Demagogos* (Fig. 16), Orozco places a dozen or so figures standing on a square monument one can assume is at the center of a *zocalo*, the plazas found in the heart of every Mexican city. Each figure preaches to his followers the merits of his ideas, ignoring completely what is being espoused by those around him, refusing to relinquish the seat of his position of power, and inciting vengeance for historic injustice. Those who listen are led to their deaths fighting their brothers for the sake of one man's arrogance. Orozco wrote this in his autobiography:

In the political field another war without quarter, another struggle for power and wealth. Subdivisions ad infinitum of the factions, unrestrained desire for vengeance, underground intrigues between the friends of today, the enemies of tomorrow, mutually eager to exterminate one another when the opportunity arises.¹⁶

Revenge, war, and hatred preclude the transcendence of the Cosmic Race. The ideal is unattainable and out of reach to those mired in past iniquity. Nothing is to be gained by needless bloodshed; it only exacerbates the misery of all. Orozco depicts this as universal truth on the pendentives supporting the dome. On each one is a dark-souled, solitary man clinging to a rocky slope. Dubbed *El Esfuerzo Humano* (Figs. 17, 18), the "Human Spirit," this reflects on the nature of man. The four figures strive to climb the ledge hoping to reach the ideal, the realization of the absolute, true human freedom, but they carry with them the burdensome weapons of war, the weight of the past, that keep them immobile. Two of the men, one of whom looks Spanish and the other indigenous, stare up as if squinting to bring into focus the object of their quest. The other two men ascend facing the wall apparently unaware of exactly where they are going. They are all

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 141.



at a point of impasse, unable to shed the toxic skin preventing their progress into the spiritual heights of the dome representing ideal man.

Just above the revolutionaries are the true sources of transfiguration. Rebirth into freedom is contingent upon truth and knowledge, and requires culture, inspiration, and expression, in short, human labor and endeavor. These ensure the potential to rise above, to transcend and to learn. But, they can also conceal truth, trapping the unsuspecting in a circle of meaninglessness and complexity, unable to reconcile and distinguish their unity. This echoes Bergson's sentiment, addressed below, when describing how atrophy and conflict occur within and amongst various philosophical schools. In discussing Orozco's "The Carnival of Ideologies" (1936 Government Palace, Guadalajara), Octavio Paz has this to say,

The...fresco shows us the political and spiritual reality of the modern world, divided into ferocious sects, each the possessor of a book in which the adept finds an answer to all the enigmas of history. In [the mural] there is a band of grotesque beings, cruel clowns, clever and stubborn madmen, sadistic men of learning each armed with a sign the crucifix, the hammer and sickle, the swastika, the fasces[sic], the keys of this world or those of the world to come. It is not difficult to recognize in these rag dolls the faces of many of the doctrinaries and masters of our century, all of them possessed by theological hatred. Each sect believes itself the possessor of the total truth and is ready to impose it on the other sects by force and extermination.¹⁷

This is very similar to what Neil Postman calls an "information glut." When an individual intellect is bombarded by so much information for information's sake, it bogs him down in a flood of rushing facts and trivia, distracting him from the minute portion which is truly valuable and necessary to sustain personal growth. It hides from him the truth of his reality much like the Hindu concept of *maya*. Thus, though they are tools for transcendence, they are also traps of ideology, and it is ideology, wrote Paz,

¹⁷Octavio Paz, *Essays on Mexican Art* (New York: Hardcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1993), 192-193.

which dehumanizes us because it makes us believe that its shadows are realities and that realities, including the reality of our own being, are nothing but shadows. It is a series of mirrors that hides reality from us, that steals our faces and our free will from us so as to turn us into reflections.¹⁸

The Will to Improve

Towering above, in the dome of the *Hospicio Cabañas*, a 500 year long epic has finally driven the consciousness of Mexico to a state in which their goal is clearly evident, the goal to achieve an authentic *mestizo* identity, the synthesis of the Spanish and Indigenous. José Clemente Orozco bestows upon the viewer a priceless treasure, a piece of himself, a moving expression of Mexico's history, and an eternal faith in the spirit of mankind.

The focus of the building sweeps the viewer skyward, like a window to the divine, to a modern form of one of the oldest human ritual symbols, the *mandala*. Earth, Air, Water and Fire (Fig. 19) spin round the dome in an endless cycle of life, death and rebirth. Elemental man occupies the four-corners of the earth, and is a personification of the four races, the resolution of Nature and Man, the nature in and of man. As is typical with Orozco's painting, there exists many levels of interpretation, which is his true genius. On one level the *Man of Fire* symbolizes Orozco's own synthesis, of a man borne of two cultures. But it is also the promise of an end to the torment of any Mexican in whose soul the battle still rages. And its meaning can be extended from the particular individual to the more universal realm of peoples, of the Mexican *Volkgeist*, the cultural backdrop. Edward Wilson, in his book *Consilience* (1997), illustrates the point I wish to make,

¹⁸Ibid., 192.

Pascal had compared the human race to a man who never dies, always gaining knowledge, while Leibniz spoke of the Present big with the Future. Turgot [wrote] that 'all epochs are fastened together by a sequence of causes and effects, linking the condition of the world to all the conditions which have gone before it.' In consequence, 'the human race, observed from its first beginning, seems in the eyes of the philosopher to be one vast whole, which, like each individual in it, has its own infancy and its own conditions of growth.'¹⁹

Earth, Water and Air form an almost complete circle to surround the Man of Fire.

The first two can be interpreted as allegories of the Indians and Spanish respectively.

The features of the Man of Earth are clearly indigenous. As Pre-Columbian religion was based on an intimate knowledge of the earth and the cyclic nature of the universe, cultural traditions evolved in response to the relationship of Native American man to the natural environment. This relation was so strong that their culture was dominated by its deep connection with the earth. Though the Man of Air seems to be given little attention and easily goes unnoticed, it serves as a fundamental bridge linking Water and Earth, for it is the winds of the Atlantic that brought them together. He reaches out to touch the shoulder of the Man of Earth in a gesture of solidarity, but is squelched by the right arm of the Man of Water who stands in stark dialectical contrast with the Man of Earth, and has a decidedly classic Spanish physiognomy. His culture has been given domain over the earth by decree of their Christian God and their mastery of the seas. This preordained meeting set in motion a cleansing confrontation which, tempered in the fires of violent conflict, forges a new race, an alloy of infinitely stronger constitution, the *mestizo*.

Symbolically the two races extend a hand as an almost disingenuous, yet imminent, gesture of embracing one another, of assimilating the past into the present, of a transforming synthesis, that the burden borne for so long might be lifted. This idea is further illustrated in Orozco's philosophy of art:

¹⁹Edmond O. Wilson, *Consilience* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), 20.

The art of the New World cannot take root in the old traditions of the Old World, nor in aboriginal traditions represented by the remains of our ancient Indian peoples. Although the art of all races and of all times has a common value--human, universal--each new cycle must work for itself, must create, must yield its own production, its individual share to the common good ... If new races have appeared upon the lands of the New World, such races have the unavoidable duty to produce a new art in a new spiritual and physical medium. Any other road is plain cowardice.²⁰

The labor of this exceptional visionary artist penetrates the heart and soul revealing to us a glimpse of the divine in man. It begs our attention and yearns to speak a mystical truth to those willing to listen. Within Orozco was a united heritage, a synthesis of races. His ability to grasp this state of being and extend it to his people so that they too might assume their proper identity as strong, proud Mexicans remains the most convincing evidence of his genius.

The sensual forms of fresco painting express like no other medium the power of artistic endeavor to describe the essence of a people. Given the walls of one structure Orozco was able to raise the level of Mexican consciousness, to awaken the awareness of their identity. Like the art of the Greeks, highly revered by both Hegel and Orozco, Mexico now had an aesthetic that valorized human existence. Greek society realized a human centered world and reached a self-consciousness in which the human mind and human form were the highest states of being. Greek art was a celebration of human excellence; their art glorified man as the highest earthly achievement. Likewise, modern Mexican art, especially the works of Orozco, focuses directly on the human condition and its ideal state. Orozco offers us a look inside Mexico to gain further understanding of the universal self and the intricate web that links everything inextricably together.

²⁰Reed, *Orozco*, 87.

This remarkable fresco series offers us an amplified view of Mexico's past or at least a vivid interpretation of this past. As is often the case in historical teaching, the lessons learned from past experience are best absorbed when incorporated into the psyche of the student. By this, I mean to say, when the individual is able to connect in some way the experiences of others or other nations to his or her own experience and incorporate them solidly into helping direct action in their own life; when history and art become powerful tools to unite and guide people across the world, helping them to empathize with the histories of other peoples. To fully understand and appreciate the universality of the dialectic, one must compare and contrast these experiences with those of one's own culture, digging deeply into them both in order to draw out their existential lessons.

Fernandez believed Orozco,

thought about and expressed the idea of the Conquest in terms of all mankind, not in terms of likes and dislikes, of equally discredited ideas of Spain or of the Indian; he saw from the meeting of diverse cultures as a form of painful birth, there emerged a new world.²¹

Orozco's fresco series clearly depicts the particular forces that have shaped the modern Mexican, but it is in the final analysis a portrait of those historical forces that shape all of humanity and individual identity. The idea encoded in this fresco is itself cyclic; it flows from the individual (the artist himself)--the particular--and expands to the universal, the Mexican collective identity, to coalesce into a vision of the dependent relationship between individuals and the wider universal sphere; it reveals that the true source of transcendence dwells in each of us. Indeed, as one looks into the swirling dome of the Cabañas Institute, an individual stands in the fire of life. Surrounding him are the

²¹Fernandez, "Orozco, Genius of America," 143.

widening spheres of his reality which are constantly bombarding his sensual perception (Fig. 20). He is a product of his culture, a product of man's creativity and genius. The radiating concentric circles, pulsing a continuous flow of the life's blood, reinforce this notion, while reminding him that he is still ascending, he rises above if he chooses, or, he will be dragged along behind; active or passive. Echavarria believed that in "fact, there is no end. It opens widely into the future. And its conclusion is not a perfect chord: it reflects the double mystery of Universe and Man, of the Man of Fire, the living spiritual torch, in its infinite ascension."²²

²²Echavarria, *Orozco, Hospicio Cabanas*, 12.

Chapter 3

THE SEEDS OF GENIUS

That an artist acts in response to a particular sphere of historical experience reveals a paradoxical dilemma in the understanding of humanity and its evolution. Humans are both formed by and formers of their world (to widely varying degrees), a concept far too few have clearly sought to comprehend. A self-conscious awareness of this relationship between the individual and society, between the particular and the universal, is the crux of most idealist philosophies. Works of art created during times of great conflict, strife, and violence often generate the most powerful expressions, not only of the relationship itself, but also of an intimate understanding of that relationship on the part of the artist. It is misery, suffering, and chaos that most acutely focus an artist's vision. This most sobering of environments presents artists with the opportunity to enhance their role as re-formers, not simply as reformers, of their environment. In this blinding clarity an artist has the potential to transform apparent chaos into order, as noted by T. E. Hulme,

Great painters are men in whom has originated a certain vision of things which has become or will become the vision of everybody. Once the painter has seen it, it becomes easy for all of us to see it. A mould has been made. But the creative activity came in the effort which was necessary to disentangle this particular type of vision from the general haze, the effort, that is, which is necessary to break moulds and to make new ones.²³

²³T. E. Hulme in Christopher Perricone, "Art and the Metamorphosis of Art into History" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 31; 4 (October, 1991): 313.

Orozco likewise believed, that art “is the creating by man of order in the universe. When an art does not properly create order; when it degenerates to a mere formula or a mere system: then it is decadent. When this comes about a new mode of synthesis is evolved as a medicine for what has come before.”²⁴ This theme is ever-present in the later art of Orozco, the theme of the revolutionary (or artist) as creator and destroyer, proactively contributing to the destruction of the old ideological order while helping to shape the new. This applies equally to art as it would to political, philosophic, or scientific ideology. When any of these social facets fails to properly create order, the formulas and systems dry up into puddles of stagnation, and in a pool of putrid water decadence is inevitable. Thus, the world is in constant need of revolutionary figures that re-order the universe and synthesize that which has come before into an antidote for the decadence of the present.

One of the major precepts to come from Orozco’s work is that of continuous reinvention, thus is derived his employment of the revolutionary theme. He believes there is a duty on the part of humanity to revolutionize itself as a way of ensuring growth, as a means towards greater understanding of ourselves. This is a demand set down in Orozco’s art, that reinterpretation is mandatory, that all which has come before will be synthesized as a medicine. Thus, here today, we must continue to look at our cultural past and reexamine what it means to us now. This is especially important in times of tremendous change, so that the new emerging order will not continue its old habits under “new management.”

Although an exhaustive biography of José Clemente Orozco is not the goal of this

²⁴David W Scott, “Orozco’s Prometheus” *College Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (Fall, 1957): 15.

paper, it is impossible to separate Orozco the man from Orozco the artist, as Justino Fernandez asserts, “in Orozco are united the thinker and the artist.”²⁵ Highlighting some of the seminal experiences in his life is essential to frame the analysis of his most successful mural series at the Cabañas Institute. (See Appendix C for a detailed chronology of Orozco’s life.)

Childhood and Revolution

Orozco was born in 1883 near Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco to prosperous middle-class parents. His father was involved in several entrepreneurial businesses including printing and book-binding, as well as the manufacture of soaps, inks and dyes. Rosa Flores, Orozco’s mother, came from a wealthy family in Guadalajara. She was a strong, independent-minded Catholic whom Orozco adored. His family moved in 1885 to the city of Guadalajara, which requested some fifty years later that he, the son of Jalisco, return to decorate their public buildings. From the time of his birth until his twenty-eighth year, he, and all Mexicans, lived under the rule of one man, Porfirio Diaz. This period contrasts starkly with the Mexico he knew in his thirties. The relatively calm, albeit tyrannical, *Porfiriato*--the so-named era of the Diaz regime--was shattered in 1910 with the onset of the Revolution.

Several major events in Orozco’s life provide us with an understanding of how he came to choose his life’s work. In 1890, the Orozco family moved to Mexico City due to financial difficulties. During the years that followed, Orozco quickly became entranced by the work of printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, who worked in the famous Arroyo printshop near his school. The impact of this experience slowly emerged to

²⁵Fernandez, “Orozco, Genius of America,” 143.

spark his passionate faith in the magic of art, which led him to a career in the graphic arts, involved him deeply in the revolution, and eventually turned him into the most significant muralist of the twentieth century. Polcari states that from “Posada, Orozco partially drew his view of the two-sided nature of humanity and its corruption and pathos, regardless of class.”²⁶ Beyond this very direct impact of Posada on Orozco’s work is the atmosphere of the capital city itself.

Like all major cities Mexico City exemplifies the best and worst of humanity. The Orozco household was within sight of the San Carlos Fine Arts Academy. Orozco was surrounded by the splendor of Mexican culture, by the grandeur of colonial architecture, the wealth of museums and theaters, and its magnificent music. Here, too, were houses of prostitution, *pulque* bars, and of course, regular episodes of violence. Orozco’s mother was highly creative and active in painting and especially music. She had recognized early on that José Clemente was a precocious child, particularly in his artistic ability. So convinced was she of her son’s talent, that when José insisted on art lessons she went straight to the academy and persuaded the director to enroll him unofficially when he began primary school at the *Escuela de Maestros*. In the Alma Reed biography of Orozco, his sister, Rosa, attests to José’s diligent studies and the impression he made on the teachers and students of San Carlos.

Two more events in Orozco’s life cemented his choice to become an artist. The first occurred in 1900, while simultaneously attending the National Preparatory School, studying architecture, and the Agricultural School of *San Jacinto*. A lab experiment caused an explosion in which he lost his left hand and permanently damaged both his

²⁶Stephen Polcari, “Orozco and Pollock: Epic Transfigurations,” *American Art* 6, no. 3 (Summer, 1992): 41. Beyond

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hearing and sight. This physical disfigurement was once used by a critic of Orozco's first exhibit to cast him as physically and morally degenerate. The psychological impact of his handicaps undoubtedly increased the depth of empathy with humanity he was able to achieve. Helm notes how prevalent the iconographical imagery of hands is in Orozco's work, from the early revolutionary scenes of dismemberment, the hands at *San Ildefonso* and the Omniscience mural, to the hands of Prometheus, Hidalgo, and Cortés, "his baroque emphasis of the hand is no less moving than Greco's."²⁷ The most exemplary image is "The Wounded" (Fig. 21), a drawing done between 1913 and 1917, which was once owned by Orozco patron and devotee, Alma Reed. In her 1956 biography *Orozco*, she relates her feelings about its meaning,

Here a railroad station, such as the Autobiography describes, has been hastily converted into a field hospital. Its floor is strewn with the dead, the dying, and the mutilated. Sitting upright in the foreground is a quadruple amputee, a nude youth with his stumps of arms and legs swathed in bandages. His eyes, too, are bandaged, but their accusing gaze seems to burn through the cloth to direct a curse upon an insane world that can find no better use for his virile young manhood than to hack it to pieces even before he is given a chance to live, to mate, to contribute his unique link in the evolutionary chain that leads from savage hate to fraternal love.²⁸

Surprisingly, it appears that Orozco was never bitter about this experience. It was common during the revolution for the warring armies to forcefully draft civilians as needed. Able men of all ages would be rounded up in towns and villages and taken against their will. Orozco, on more than one occasion, had been excused because of his missing hand and came to see it rather as an asset. His handicap was however an accident, an event which should naturally befall but a few. The revolution made it commonplace.

²⁷Helm, *Man of Fire*, 10.

²⁸Reed, *Orozco*, 40.

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By 1904, having committed himself to the idea of becoming an artist, Orozco abandons his architectural studies at the National Preparatory School. His father's death in 1907 brought his modest financial support to an end and forced Orozco to begin working as an illustrator in order to continue his education. In that same year he took a job as a draftsman with the Mexico City newspaper *El Imparcial*. In these events, the accident and his father's death, Orozco was released from a life course he did not want to follow. Studying agriculture had been the wish of his father, while architecture had been but a compromise between that and his own desire to become a painter. Because he had lost patriarchal pressure and support, he was thus finally able to enter the San Carlos Academy full-time in 1908 to study painting. This was the year when he first met Diego Rivera. In 1907 Gerardo Murillo, also known as Dr. Atl, came back from Europe to teach at San Carlos. He was the first to plant the seed of the muralist movement that emerged a decade later. He had a strong impact on Orozco's art and "encouraged the young students to strive for expressive exaggeration."²⁹ Atl had begun experimentation with mural media by 1910, and the group of students who followed him never lost the inspiration to reinvent Mexican art on the walls of their country's architecture. However, the Revolution halted for a time any further development.

The ideal in contrast to the real has been adapted endlessly by artists, and in this sense Orozco's work is an extension of the Western tradition, of the tension between the sacred and the profane. In those times of immense struggle, perhaps it is the disparity between the ideal and the real that invests their art with such timeless potency. In Mexico, Orozco witnessed some of the most deplorable acts of humanity, a people

²⁹Scott, "Orozco's Prometheus," 9.

frenzied by ideological rhetoric, espoused by men who had become consumed by their own ideological hatred for those who were not of precisely the same persuasion. After five hundred years of seepage the thick walls erected to contain the rage of the *mestizo* became saturated until these weakened levies suddenly burst unleashing in a flood of bloodshed and brutality. In the decade from 1910 to 1920 some two million people were killed in Mexico as a direct result of the Revolution. Although Orozco did not personally take part in the physical revolution, he did participate in the propaganda machine built by Dr. Atl for the pro-Carranza movement. As the Revolution broke, factionous groups were forced to retreat to safety. Orozco and several other artists followed Atl to the capital city of Veracruz, Orizaba, and set up a printshop for the newspaper *La Vanguardia*.

During his tenure with *La Vanguardia* in Orizaba, some of the fiercest fighting of the revolution took place confronting him and everyone with a daily barrage of violence issuing from a people stricken mad by the emotional hemorrhage of a war without meaning. Orozco's friend and confidante Jean Charlot, the French ex-patriot and artist, wrote in a 1949 article, that by "1914 Huerta was in flight; Carranza, Villa and Zapata were engaged in a royal melee around the vacant presidential chair. Channeled into politics by his friend and exalted mentor, Dr. Atl, Orozco sided with Carranza, following him into hasty retreat when enemy hordes overran the capital."³⁰ This period of civil war was the most important experience in Orozco's life and for his work. Its impact on this man in his thirties was absolute. The seeds had been planted from which grew an epic expression of one man's life philosophy rooted in the historic struggle of a newly emerging people. "Even at this stage Orozco combined opposites both in irony and as a

³⁰Jean Charlot, "Orozco's stylistic evolution," *College Art Journal* IX;2 (Winter, 1949-1950): 149.

form of dialectic. An appreciation of this methodology is crucial to an understanding of his mature murals.”³¹ It is indeed crucial, and the point of this paper is to further that understanding. The murals of Guadalajara represent a coalescence of insight and expertise. His keen ability to absorb the world around him as an individual spectator, not so much as participant--observing, reflecting and recording--within the context of the Mexican Revolution, provided Orozco with the ideas which later filled his murals.

It seems that it was the process of turning to Revolutionary themes that Orozco found the inspiration that enabled him to fuse the particular and the general in his murals. In form and subject, Orozco now began with what he felt personally and intimately: this he simplified until he achieved a statement that combined the poignancy of the immediate with the significance of the universal...In developing the Revolution theme Orozco moved toward a fuller understanding of himself, of mankind, and of art.³²

The Inception of the Public Mural

Orozco began his artistic development with caricatures and cartoons during the second decade of the century. In them he records the reality of the Revolution--the prostitutes, the poor, the peasants, the revolutionaries and the demagogues--as he saw it. During this period Orozco began an observation of movement, the fluidity of reality rather than the stability of tradition. At San Carlos there had been tedious repetition, constant copying and recopying of the Western masters. The Revolution provided a source for the warehousing of experiences and imagery, a period of observation. Slowly, through his first murals at the Preparatory School (1923-26) (Fig. 22), but especially with those at Pomona College (1930), the New York School of Social Research (1930-31), and Dartmouth College (1932), Orozco began rooting out the sources of this reality in the

³¹David Elliot, “Orozco: a Beginning,” in *Orozco! 1883-1949* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 14.

³²Fernandez, “Orozco, Genius of America,” 143.

history of Mexico and North America. He found in it a mechanism for transcendence, the creation of a visual philosophy of history in which the thesis and antithesis have created the *mestizo* or *American* synthesis, which is no longer bound to the racial tensions of the past, beholden to neither the prejudices of Indio nor Spaniard. Orozco also discovered in that history the relationship of Master and Servant.

With Orozco, one can trace in the evolution of his work much more than a simple maturing of style. His artistic development represents mental snapshots of a man accumulating personal wisdom, turning thought into action, translating what he could not promulgate in words into painting... "What I have to say, I say in painting."³³ Beginning then with his prostitute watercolors we can discern the employment of an archetype to convey a symbolic or metaphoric meaning, the prostitute as a symbol of suffering. Scholar Bernard Myers has said, "That throughout his career he returns to the prostitute theme, not in any cynical metropolitan sense but rather as a Dostoyevskian symbol of the corruption and weakness, the sadness and isolation of the individual."³⁴ (Fig. 23)

In 1920 the history of Mexican art changed forever with the election of President Alvaro Obregon whose stated goal was to "liberate the country from its liberators."³⁵ Obregon was decidedly against ideological radicalism, and instead prescribed to a conservative vision of government not far removed from that of Diaz, but more open and free. Shortly after taking office Obregon appointed José Vasconcelos as of Minister of Public Education, he embarked on a crusade to educate rural Mexicans in cultivation,

³³Orozco was wary of stating what his painting was all about. His philosophy of freedom demanded that definitions and interpretations of his art be open-ended and not specified which reveals a conscious understanding on the changing nature of an art work as it exists through time. Orozco did not want to lock the interpretation of his works into his own time or place. He saw art as an evolving process of understanding and analysis.

³⁴Bernard S. Myers, *Mexican Painting in Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 43.

³⁵Enrique Krauze, *Mexico Biography of Power* (New York: Harper Collins Books 1997), 391.

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hygiene, crafts, and skills by building schools in their communities. Beyond his revolutionary ideas about public education, however, Vasconcelos implemented the program of didactic public muralism in 1921. Although Vasconcelos resigned two years later, public muralism is his most enduring legacy. This proved to be most beneficial to Mexican artists who began to organize and receive state sponsored commissions for the painting of public spaces. Among the artists involved at its inception were Orozco, Diego Rivera, Alfaro Siqueiros, Jean Charlot, and Roberto Montenegro, “who took over the walls of venerable colonial buildings to express the social gospel of the Revolution.”³⁶ Mexican historian Enrique Krauze believes that; “During Obregon’s term, Mexico experienced a true rebirth of national values, a varied and broad-based return to its origins: the indigenous and Spanish past, the colonial and provincial traditions.”³⁷ As the artists developed their ideas around the philosophy of Vasconcelos, a manifesto was written by Siqueiros and signed by the members of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. The initial excitement and cohesion of this collective was soon stalled as political change once again thrust artists into a state of instability which forced an unhealthy competition amongst them. Orozco began to consciously distance himself from members of the group, especially Siqueiros and Rivera. The relationship between the *Tres Grandes*, as they are known, will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

The great mural experiment began in earnest on the walls of *San Ildefonso* in 1922. Space was allotted to each artist and after an intensive study of the fresco technique Orozco started his first murals. “From the beginning, Orozco was interested in the rediscovery and the development of fresco. After long research and experiment he

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 394

worked out with the help of native masons, a technique which proved to be so efficient and so complete as to compare favorably with that of European and the aboriginal American fresco painters.”³⁸ With the election of Plutarco Calles in 1924, the entire mural movement was in jeopardy. Calles’ desire to “eradicate the Catholic faith from Mexico” created a violent backlash against the government. Tens of thousands were killed in bloody clashes during this four-year term from 1924 to 1928. When Orozco’s unfinished murals were attacked as anti-Catholic, federal funds for their completion dried up in the face of harsh criticism. In the meantime, Orozco completed two other murals before being asked by the Calles regime to return to his work in 1926.

In the mural “Omniscience” (*Casa de Los Azuelos*, Mexico City, 1925) (Fig. 24) Orozco again used a monumental figure as an allegorical message. Here we see a precursor to the Prometheus mural in California. Two hands extend from the heavens to give the flame of knowledge to the world. This mural was probably his first truly philosophical representation. He would add to his idiom the historical focus with the murals of Orizaba (Orizaba Industrial School, 1926) (Fig. 25). Here Orozco pierces the skin of the revolution--in a style we have come to expect--to reveal the ambiguity of its intent. The symbols of prostitutes are replaced by grieving *soldaderas*, the feminine form of *soldier* in Spanish. We can see in these murals a period of reflection on the events of the Revolution and the genesis of Orozco’s stylistic idiom to come. The theme of the Revolution gave Orozco a way to visually express his historical philosophy of freedom.

Although the Calles government wanted to exclude Orozco from continued public support, other artists involved in the mural program insisted that Orozco be retained. In

³⁸Alma Reed, *Jose Clemente Orozco: An Introduction by Alma Reed* (New York: Delphic Studios, 1932), 3.

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1926 his commission was reinstated and he began work once again at *San Ildefonso*. The reworking of the Preparatory School (Fig. 22) murals refines his vision of the Revolution. These murals had been defaced in the 1924 student riots after the Calles presidency began and after Orozco had been dismissed from his work as well as his teaching position. Taken as a whole, this series is a tremendous effort on the part of Orozco to sort out and summarize Mexico's pre-revolutionary history, its indigenous and colonial heritage.

The 1926 mural of "Cortés and Malinche" (Fig. 26), represents the fateful meeting of the Old and New Worlds. It can also be seen as the initial stage of the Master/Servant dialectic, the victorious Cortés in a gesture of his dominance over the submissive Malinche. Cortés, personifying the Spanish culture, presses his foot onto the legs of a lifeless figure at their feet while restraining Malinche, the personified Indian peoples, from approaching it. This prone figure, which can be read as the *mestizo* offspring of this cultural collision, represents the suppression of the indigenous cultures by Spanish dominance, by Spanish social institutions, and Spanish cultural hegemony. And it is this that lies at the root of the existential crisis of Mexico as manifested in the Revolution.

Although Orozco and the other initiators of the muralist movement had completed much of the decoration of the Preparatory School, many thought it was too reliant on Christian themes and European tradition. Upon his return in 1926, he chose to rework those images on the ground floor, keeping only the two on each end. The first panel is "The Rich Banquet while the Workers Quarrel" (Fig. 27) while the last panel is a Botticelli-like image of "Maternity" (Fig. 28). These images represent the two extremes of Orozco's artistic style, the former, a Mexican graphic tradition of penetrating sarcasm

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the latter, a product of Spanish and European painting tradition which he continued to reconcile as he matured. The former shows Orozco's masterful command of caricature at the service of criticism. Orozco often reverts to caricature when dealing with the elite. For Orozco only caricature best expressed the true nature of this exclusive class of self-absorbed personages. Between these he recreates the series in his newly emerging linear and expressionistic style, a synthesis of these extremes. His figures, taking on their quintessential Orozco characteristics, have become complex allegories and are some of his most celebrated images, including "The Trench" (Fig. 29), "The Revolutionary Trinity" (Fig. 30), "The Strike and The Destruction of the Old Order."

During this time he was also given additional space including one of the monumental stone stairwells, in which he explored his missionary themes of the Franciscan monk and the naked convert. These Franciscan images are further developed in the Cabañas Institute. Taken as a whole Orozco's work here may be viewed as a grand series of studies, a study of themes, but also of the medium itself.

Orozco in New York

The artists stay in New York proved the second significant period of his life, after the revolution. Here he acquired the language with which to give a visual voice to the Mexican historic struggle for identity, and simultaneously presented a philosophy for the individual, one of change, adaptation and elaboration--a philosophy of life as an aesthetic pursuit in which you are your own work of art. In those years from 1927 to 1934, Orozco began a process of assimilation. His early Expressionistic style as seen in his graphic work--cartoons, caricatures and watercolors of prostitutes--merged with his classical process learned from training at San Carlos. Like Delacroix or Gericault, who both found

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ways to reinvent the allegories of the Neo-Classicists of the Davidian school in early nineteenth century France, Orozco could not wholly separate himself from that mold he was trying to change. Instead, he took advantage of all the traditions he was a product of, neglecting neither his indigenous nor his Spanish heritage, broke them down, took what he needed and refashioned them into a uniquely American art form.³⁹

The political situation in Mexico at the end of 1927 peaked with the execution of a Jesuit priest carried out by the Calles regime. As he had in 1917, Orozco decided to move to the United States in order to continue his artistic career. Mexican artists, like Miguel Covarrubias, had found modest success in New York City's thriving art scene. On December 11, 1927 Orozco headed North to an unknown and alien world. Jean Charlot recounts the mood and disposition of the dejected artist;

Orozco left Mexico an embittered and lonely man. He had concluded his cycle of frescoes at the Preparatory School despite the jeers of a majority of teachers and students, and the physical destruction of much that he had previously painted. Painful had been to him the defection of Rivera, a fellow muralist, in his hour of need. Rivera's friend, Salvador Novo, published an article that all but justified the vandalism. In it, Orozco was referred to as a pupil of Rivera, and a quite unworthy one at that.⁴⁰

Orozco's first months in New York were truly miserable, especially for an artist who had witnessed the destruction of some of his first murals at the hands of conservative students just two years before. With no hope of state sponsored commissions in Mexico he was forced to travel to New York as a matter of financial and artistic necessity. It is during these months of poverty, solitude and loneliness that Orozco began a period of self-reflection from which evolved his philosophic system of imagery and direct

³⁹When I use the term American, I am referring to all Americans, from both North and South. I am arguing here that there is a peculiar philosophical and cultural link between those of the Americas, especially between the U.S. and Mexico. As all Americans are products of the colonial age, there exists solidarity in perspective and development.

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expression. In a letter to Jean Charlot from June 3rd, 1928, Orozco wrote; “You must not think that I have done anything new, I have limited myself to looking, observing, and meditating.”⁴¹ He also took advantage of the many European paintings exhibiting in New York galleries at that time. Several letters written to Charlot during this time discuss Orozco’s critical response to the European “masters.” He had exceptional praise for the colors of Matisse and Renoir, the solidity of Cezanne, the purity of Seurat, and the power of Rouault’s aquatints. After seeing the works of Rouault, Orozco told Charlot he had begun “to study feverishly etching and aquatint. Already I have much information, some copper plates, acids etc...I visited some workshops and I now know etching from A to Z.”⁴²

Orozco was also able to see, for the first time, extensive collections of paintings by Spanish masters El Greco, Goya and Velasquez. In another letter to Charlot, he refers to El Greco as a god amongst painters. As for Goya, Orozco wrote that indeed, “the only feeling one dares to feel is humility, as if one was confronted by a storm, a planet, or any other one of nature’s spectacles.”⁴³ Orozco’s first contact with contemporary Spanish master, Picasso, found him thoroughly unimpressed, but Picasso’s work slowly grew on him. Orozco eventually admitted that Picasso “disconcerts, disquiets, wounds, impassions, repulses, only to suddenly attract forcefully.”⁴⁴ Orozco reserved his harshest criticisms for Degas and Lautrec, ironically dismissing “these masters that seem to us

⁴⁰Jean Charlot, trans. by Ruth L. C. Simms, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925-1929*, (University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1974), 40.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 51.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 45

⁴³*Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

closer to him: Degas with his cruel probing of the form divine; Lautrec, punning pitilessly at the expense of even of the models he liked best.”⁴⁵

Orozco’s biggest disappointment came with an unsuccessful Art Center exhibition of Mexican artists (January, 1928), of which he was one, in what he described as “a total failure, absolute, final.”⁴⁶ In contrast, a one-man show by Diego Rivera was well received by critics, dubbing him “many-sided” and a “great man.” The New York experience increased Orozco’s contempt for the self-promoting Rivera, whom he often referred to with some Russian variation of his name like “Diegoff” or “Diego Riveritch Romanoff.” Presumably, Orozco is making a biting reference to Rivera’s close, albeit shallow, ties to the Communist Party.

Following Orozco’s initial disenchantment with his situation in New York, things changed dramatically in Spring, 1928, due primarily to his interaction with Alma Reed and those of the “Ashram” and Delphic Movement, namely Eva Sikelianos, wife of the famous Greek poet. Reed had become a great admirer of Orozco and his work. She actively began promoting his work in New York by opening a gallery named the Delphic Studios. This interaction was central to Orozco’s succeeding philosophic explorations.

At meetings of the Delphic Movement, Orozco had become familiar with Aeschylus and Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom used the heroic image of Prometheus as artist and transformer of culture to assert universal values.⁴⁷

While in New York Orozco also explored the various attractions and neighborhoods that surrounded him. In his Autobiography he reminisces enthusiastically about visits to Harlem, Vaudeville, and Coney Island, which were subjects of some of his

⁴⁵Jean Charlot, “Orozco in New York” *College Art Journal* XIX;1 (Fall, 1959): 47. In a letter from April of 1928, Orozco reveals a bit of his humble nature when he writes, “I detest Mr. Degas more and more. How I wish I could take his work and hang them in a barber shop...I don’t know what the devil I am doing in art Criticism, damn it! Don’t pay any attention to me.

paintings and lithographs from this period, including “Vaudeville in Harlem” and “Coney Island Sideshow.” The United States also provided a contrasting view of the racial struggle in the Americas. The experience left Orozco more convinced that race was the essential dilemma of the New World, not class. Those who lived in the Americas were products of an entirely American paradigm, one in which a history of ubiquitous racial and cultural conflict was a perpetually divisive tool used by corrupt leaders, as a political strategy for the acquisition and maintenance of power. “Orozco saw the history of our Hemisphere as a form of grand tragedy, with human aspirations for peace, order and dignity thwarted repeatedly by institutional dogmas of religion or politics.”⁴⁸ For this reason Orozco denied the applicability of Communism to the American experience because it was focussed on class while the New World was mired in race. Orozco was in New York through the peak of the Harlem Renaissance in the late twenties. He was likewise to witness its collapse as the United States sank into the Great Depression. By 1933, echoing Orozco’s sentiment, W. E. B. DuBois was less than enthusiastic about the efficacy of a Marxian revolution in the United States. He wrote in *The Crisis*:

We can only say, as it seems to me, that the Marxian philosophy is a true diagnosis of the situation in Western Europe in the middle of the 19th Century, despite some of its logical difficulties. But it must be modified in the United States of America and especially so far as the Negro group is concerned. The Negro is exploited to a degree that means poverty, crime, delinquency, and indigence. And that exploitation comes not from a black capitalist class, but from the white capitalists and equally from the white proletariat. [...] The shrill cry of a few communists is not even listened to, because and solely because it seeks to break down the barriers between black and white. There is not at present the slightest indication that a Marxian revolution based on a united class-conscious proletariat is anywhere on the American far horizon. Rather race antagonism and labor group rivalry are still undisturbed by world catastrophe. In the hearts of

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Polcari, “Orozco and Pollock,” 44.

⁴⁸Patricia Harris and David Lyon, “Shining On: Orozco’s Epic of American Civilization,” *Américas* 31:1 (1990): 60.

black laborers alone, therefore, lie those ideals of democracy in politics and industry which may in time make the workers of the world effective dictators of civilization.⁴⁹

DuBois essentially believed that the issue of class cannot provide adequate united action until the issue of race has been reconciled. For him, the “masses” were not yet capable of focussing their collective energies to thereby gain a self-conscious understanding of their individual unity with others of the exploited classes. Although the situation in Mexico is quite different in that a racial synthesis has been achieved, the *mestizo* psyche continues to be victimized by the pigmentocracy inherited from the Conquest. Overzealous and self-righteous leaders from the extremes of this racial duality exploit the cultural or ethnic ambivalence of the *mestizo*. Orozco saw Communism simply as another means for ideological control that would suppress self-consciousness rather than promote it. Here, in the racially polarized environment of the United States Orozco fully established--or at the least reaffirmed--his belief in the “color line” as the prominent and essential issue to be addressed. Gutierrez-Solana, curator of the J.C. Orozco and Diego Rivera exhibition at Queens Museum in 1979, wrote in its accompanying catalogue “Orozco believed that the only hope for mankind lay in the abolition of interracial hostility and the caste systems that fostered it.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, this conveys an understanding of the sympathy established between Mexican and African-American artists during the thirties and forties as asserted by Goldman and LaFalle in their book *In the Spirit of Resistance* (1997).

⁴⁹W. E. B. DuBois, *A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 543.

⁵⁰Carlos Gutierrez-Solana, *Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera: paintings, drawings and prints*. Queens Museum Exhibition Catalogue, September 15 through November 11, 1979.

By 1930 Orozco's luck improved as he secured a commission to paint a mural at a small college on the West Coast. Here Orozco comes closest to his beloved El Greco. In the Prometheus mural (Fig. 31) of Pomona College in Claremont, California, we can see an emerging sense of self-conscious exploration, an attempt to express in plastic form the internal conflict raging through his soul. It is an attempt to reconcile his individual existence within a universal context.

Indeed, it is not a strained interpretation to see in the Prometheus figure Orozco himself the isolated artist, struggling titanically, consumed by the very creative gift he brings to man, received by an indifferent or hostile crowd.⁵¹

But this is also a time of tremendous clarity when the experiences of the revolution were transforming into a coherent image of a particular people participating in and contributing to a universal struggle to achieve freedom; to refine and to redefine the very meaning of freedom. Micheal Brenson has written that, "Orozco's theme was nothing less than that of the eternal threat to individual freedom."⁵² The Prometheus mural at Pomona College exemplifies his Classical Spanish heritage, in form as well as in subject, with the exploration of a universalizing Greek allegory, the martyrdom of a revolutionary hero, and his gift of fire consuming the ignorant, the unwise, and the foolish exploiters and victims of its power.

Shortly after finishing the Pomona mural Orozco returned to New York and executed, apparently for free, the frescoes at the New School for Social Research. Influenced by the theories of Jay Hambridge concerning "dynamic symmetry," these murals are closely related to the discussions that took place at the Ashram and Delphic

⁵¹Scott, "Orozco's Prometheus," 6.

⁵²Micheal Brenson, "Orozco: Mexican Conscience," *Art in America* 67;5 (September, 1979): 78.

Studios. Taking only forty-six days to complete, Orozco depicted in unusually realistic portraits the leaders of contemporary world revolutions for peace, including Ghandi, Lenin and Felipe Carillo Puerto. This last figure was Alma Reed's fiancé and governor of the state of Yucatan. He had been assassinated before their marriage which memorialized him here as a hero of the Mexican fight for freedom. These murals were not well received by the critics which disappointed Orozco greatly, but thanks, in part to Reed, he was soon offered the walls of the Reserve room in Baker Hall at Dartmouth. At some 3000 square feet, this hall prepared Orozco for the task of decorating the Cabañas Institute four years later.

In Spring 1932, Orozco began the "Epic of American Civilization" at Dartmouth College (Fig. 32). He continued the theme of myth from Pomona, this time choosing one indigenous to the New World. Mexico, representing the unified Americas, had an equivalent allegorical icon in Quetzalcóatl, which he chose as a subject in his final major U. S. mural. In many ways the Prometheus mural is an introduction to those at Dartmouth; to establish an allegorical acquaintance between them. It serves as a primer setting the theme for his murals to come, which merged Western fresco with pre-Columbian narrative mural painting to proclaim the independent nature of the American, born of two worlds and thus transcending them both.

Orozco's "Epic of American Civilization" contrasts the well-known Prometheus myth, a symbol with which Westerners were comfortable, with the myth of Quetzalcóatl which was not simply allegory, but also prophesy. In a Dartmouth College news release in May 25, 1932, Orozco wrote that,

The American continental races are now becoming aware of their own personality as it emerges from the cultural currents, the indigenous and the European. The

great American myth of Quetzalcóatl is a living one, embracing both elements and pointing clearly by its prophetic nature, to the responsibility shared equally by the two Americas of creating here an authentic American civilization.⁵³

According to the myth, the god that had brought knowledge and culture to Mesoamerica, peacefully enlightening its people, is ultimately banished as they descend back into the depths of superstition and decadence. Upon his departure, Quetzalcóatl vowed to return in the skin of a white man to unleash a cleansing inferno of vengeance from which would rise the *Cosmic Race*. Orozco moves from the theme of rebellious Titan to banished god. Both themes carry the same meaning however; that knowledge once given has proven often to be the exploiter of peoples. It is here that Orozco hones his fresco technique; he is given, finally, the wall space necessary to begin translating his personal philosophy and vision into a new idiom through paint. These three periods--the Revolution, the early muralist movement, and the years in New York--form the foundation for his magnificent works in Guadalajara which culminate in the Hospicio Cabañas Institute which nearly all scholars of Orozco agree are the best works of his career. In his book *Man of Fire* of 1953, MacKinley Helm points to these murals as an integration of his various styles and iconography.

Except for two or three portrait studies Cervantes, El Greco, the Episcopal founder Cabañas most of the themes of the side walls and vaulting had appeared in the earlier frescoes, but reassembled as they are in this place, and graced with new and more colorful overtones, they make a stupendous Orozco thesaurus.⁵⁴

⁵³Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States*, (Albuquerque: University of the New Mexico Press, 1991), 55.

⁵⁴Helm, *Man of Fire*, 76.

Similarly, the Cabañas Institute is the most comprehensive example of Orozco's philosophical conceptions. And it is the city of Guadalajara "which enabled him to realize himself far beyond his keenest hopes."⁵⁵

Triumphal Return

After briefly visiting Europe on a three-month tour paid for by Dartmouth, Orozco returned to Mexico in 1934. Two years later he went to Guadalajara at the request of the governor of Jalisco, Evarado Topete. Before painting the Cabañas Institute he executed two more master works in fresco, further delving into those themes and ideas aroused and distilled in his U.S. endeavor. He first painted "Creative Man and its False Leaders" (Fig. 33) at the Assembly Hall of the University, enabling Orozco to express more fully his disdain for ideology, for anything which stifles the individual creative experience. "In the relationship between the other figures, the Philosopher-teacher and the Rebel, Orozco postulates an ideal unity between thought and action."⁵⁶ This idea finds a perfect analogue in the philosophy of Bergson, which will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 4. In the panels below the dome, we see once again Orozco's warning against false leadership. Helm believed that with these murals "Orozco had taken a second look at the heroes, especially the Marxist heroes, of the new ruling classes and roundly condemned them."⁵⁷ Below the dome Orozco painted "The Public" and "The Leaders" to confront the effects of ideology on its victims. Orozco has contrasted the spiritually, emotionally, and physically emaciated with the gluttonous and obese ideologues of Mexican politics. Labor leaders stand with "books by the side, rifles at

⁵⁵ Alfred Neumeyer, "Orozco's Mission," *College Art Journal* X:2 (1951): 126.

⁵⁶ Rochfort, "Terrible Beauty," 76.

⁵⁷ Helm, *Man of Fire*, 69.

their feet and sledge hammers in their hands suggest the imposition by violence or brute force of the ideologies contained in the tomes.”⁵⁸ Fernandez further states,

Thus from the above we may conclude that the paintings around the platform of the Auditorium express the dramatic reaction of a people which has endured in its own flesh the effects of alien ideologies.⁵⁹

The mural depicting Hidalgo, the “Phantasms of Religion,” and the “Carnival of Ideologies” (Figs. 35, 36), completed in 1937 at the Government Palace in Guadalajara, restate the Prometheus allegory *and* the symbolic gift of fire which turns into a storm of destruction as freedom is given to the people of Mexico by a martyred revolutionary figure. This gift, of course, comes with a heavy responsibility. Unrestrained freedom in the hands of those unaccustomed to its power are easily corralled by charismatic leaders and their ideologies and led to their demise. Orozco uses the images of Hidalgo, Christ, Lenin, Prometheus, and *Quetzalcóatl* interchangeably for one explicit purpose; to elevate revolutionary figures as the life-force of progress. He always places them in a historical dialectic relationship with the outer social sphere to show how their ideals become corrupted by self-indulgent ideologues and in turn re-establishes the very oppression the revolutionary fought to destroy in the first place.

In 1938, Orozco began what many consider his greatest masterpiece, the murals at the de-consecrated chapel of the *Hospicio Cabañas*. Here, on 1250 square meters of wall space, he was able to bring his experiences to full fruition, an expression of his life philosophy, a portrait of his people, and a monument to the American spirit; an accomplishment rivaling those of the Sistine Chapel.

⁵⁸Fernandez, *Orozco, University of Guadalajara*, Jalisco en el Arte, (Guadalajara: Planeacion y Promocion S. A., n.d.), 32.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 34.

Bearing witness to the self-destruction of his people clearly framed the formation of his own existential philosophy which gained texture and context from a philosophic analysis of Mexican history. This Orozco distilled, internalized, and reshaped into plastic form at the Cabañas Institute in which is contained a voluminous, visual philosophic treatise. Many scholars have associated Orozco's murals with dialectical thought, however, little has been done to directly compare Orozco's visual philosophy with formal written philosophies. In so doing I wish to exemplify how three particular perspectives can be united under such universal principles as freedom. Arguments could surely be made as to the incompatibility of certain aspects and details of the philosophies presented here, but in order for one to discern those discrepancies one must also understand their unity; their unity is what I am here concerned with. It should, therefore, not be surprising to find in Orozco's work a sense of contradiction.

Chapter 4

THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY

With the goal of detailing how mind and memory--intellect and intuition--shape an individual's potential for action through experience and history, Henri Bergson offers a philosophy that will serve as a mechanism for applying the language and method of Hegel's outer dialectic to an inner dialectic; taking us from the universal to the particular. These two philosophers, Hegel and Bergson, seem particularly well-suited to illustrate the depth of thought involved in Orozco's murals, especially those in Guadalajara.

Hegel's philosophy of history acts to interpret the dialectical struggle of Mexico for freedom and self-realization depicted in the lower levels of the Cabañas Institute. Additionally, Hegel's Master/Servant dialectic introduces a heuristic model of the dynamic involved in the Spanish domination over indigenous culture *and* the ensuing split in the *mestizo* identity; an idea echoed in W. E. B. DuBois' concept of the "double-consciousness." The *dome* at the Cabañas Institute, however, presents an individual response, an expression of Orozco's personal philosophy for traversing life's path through adaptation, reinvention--a modern New-Fire ceremony.⁶⁰ There are then two struggles at work; one plays out in the wider, universal social sphere upon which we are all dependent; the other is an inner struggle to adapt and advance, to progress--to define and to express the self; an independent existence; that is, to reconcile the relationship of

⁶⁰The Meso-american New Fire Ceremony was celebrated every 52 years, based on the calendar developed by the Maya and later utilized by the Toltec and Aztec cultures.

one's own freedom with one's dependency on shared context. Justino Fernandez, who wrote extensively on Orozco and his art, most notably in *Orozco, forma y idea*, was the first to place an emphasis on the philosophico-religious meaning of Orozco's symbolism.⁶¹ He asserted the idea that,

In the Government Palace, in the Hospicio Cabañas, in the many other monumental works and in the single, independent pieces, he paints the human being under various historical circumstances, but he rises beyond them and converts them into metaphors to illustrate with them the inner reality of life.⁶²

For Hegel the evolution of the human race was leading to self-realization through a process, the perpetual struggle of ideas. His dialectic theory is a means of coordinating all of human history into a unifying human drama with which we might achieve true "substantial" freedom.⁶³ It is therefore important to study the histories of all peoples who have left evidence of their existence behind. If we bring this past into our present for the purpose of informing our action and further defining our identity, we may ensure that we are based on the "rough ground"⁶⁴ from which we can see the full scope of human

⁶¹Octavio Paz wrote in a footnote to his *Essays on Mexican Art*, "Justino Fernandez diffidently began such a study in his *Jose Clemente Orozco, forma y idea*. He examines the Prometheus at Pomona College superficially and refers to Panofsky's iconographic studies. Unfortunately, he failed to pursue the subject and delve more deeply. It is regrettable, for Justino Fernandez was the first to emphasize the philosophico-religious meaning of Orozco's symbolism." (190) Fernandez also described Orozco's work as "historic-philosophic" in *Orozco, Genius of America* (146), contrasting it with the historical-social painting of Rivera and Siqueiros.

⁶² Justino Fernandez, *Orozco, University of Guadalajara*, 38.

⁶³ Hegel describes what he means by 'substantial freedom' in *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, "If we say that the consciousness of freedom is connected with the appearance of philosophy, this principle must be a fundamental with those with whom philosophy begins; a people having this consciousness of freedom founds its existence on that principle, seeing that the laws and the whole circumstances of the people are based only on the notion that mind forms of itself and in the categories which it has. Connected with this on the practical side is the fact that actual freedom develops political freedom, and this only begins where the individual knows himself as a independent individual to be universal and real, where his significance is infinite, or where the subject has attained the consciousness of personality and thus desires to be esteemed for himself alone. Free, philosophic thought has this direct connection with practical freedom: that the former supplies thought about the absolute, universal, and real object, the latter, because it thinks itself, gives itself the character of universality." (298)

⁶⁴The term "rough ground" was used by Heidegger to describe a general basis of universal experience.

history, and thus see ourselves within that context, as opposed to how past civilizations have traditionally viewed themselves as strictly separate and apart, with the ever-threatening Other looming just beyond the horizon. John Dos Passos said of the similar American search for a useable past, we “need to know what kind of firm ground other men, belonging to generations before us, have found to stand on.”⁶⁵ This is why art is particularly useful, because it acts as a Rosetta Stone which spans not only the chasms between cultures, but also bridges past with present. It is a living reminder that the past dies only when it is forgotten, just as it is a means of preventing that from happening.

Intellect and Intuition: The inner dialectic

Any attempt to bridge the domains of experience belonging to the spiritual and the physical sides of our nature, time occupies the key position.

-Sir Arthur Eddington

I have framed the analysis of Orozco’s murals at the Cabañas Institute on the idea of an inner and outer dialectic, an inner struggle to reconcile one’s existence with the outer social sphere. I opened this paper by saying that history is the human struggle to achieve truth, or self-consciousness, whereby we might become truly free. When Hegel speaks of this he is talking about the collective human consciousness, *freedom for all*. Bergson addresses self-consciousness in a personal sense. They are, however mutually dependent. Hegel believes we as a whole are moving towards absolute freedom, a collective human self-consciousness which requires the Bergsonian sense of individual and personal self-consciousness, that helps to more successfully navigate life’s obstacles regardless of whether the outer goal is achieved; but, it is also a means towards achieving it.

⁶⁵Polcari, “Orozco and Pollock,” 38.

The theory of this turn-of-the-century French philosopher, Henri Bergson, essentially states that human reality is based on the relationship between space/time on the one hand and mind and memory on the other. Memory pools experience for the sake of better-informed action. For him, time is created by the universal expansion. Although his theory predates the monumental discoveries of Hubble, Einstein, and Bell, these cosmological insights lend credence to Bergson's philosophic treatise.⁶⁶ Bergson displays an intuitive understanding of these physical laws a decade before their articulation.

Implicit in the existence of time is a perceiver of it. Human existence is made up of two inextricably linked realms. On the one hand we have time and space, and on the other we have mind and memory. One has no meaning without the other. It does not matter that time progresses if we do not perceive that it is doing such. And inversely, memory and human spirit cannot exist without *duration* or the constant passage of time. This is what makes human beings so extraordinary, that they can act freely and become themselves active in creation.

We have in the art of world cultures a mechanism to which we might apply the idea of *duration*. The life and work of artists are *sub-durations* in and of themselves, much like Hegel's concept of the *geist*, which connects the individual and society, and are mutually dependent as reflections of the other for progress. The ideas of both men are rooted in organicism. Bergson describes his idea of duration in *The Creative Mind* as follows,

I should say that the inorganic world is a series of infinitely rapid repetitions or quasi repetitions which, when totaled, constitute the visible and pre-visible

⁶⁶I am speaking here specifically of Einstein's theories of Relativity and Quantum Physics, and Bell's Interconnectedness Theory, and Hubble's Expansion Theory.

changes. I should compare them to the swinging of the pendulum of a clock: the swingings of the pendulum are coupled to the continuous unwinding of a spring linking them together and whose unwinding they mark; the repetitions of the inorganic world constitute rhythm in the life of conscious beings and measure their duration. Thus the living being essentially has duration; it has duration precisely because it is continuously elaborating what is new and because there is no elaboration without searching, no searching without groping.⁶⁷

Duration can be likened to a forest of trees. Each tree represents a particular duration. Each year the tree blooms. The blooms are *sub-durations* of the tree, and likewise the tree a *sub-duration* of a particular geological or climatic era of a particular planet of which they are *sub-durations*, etc. The trees grow from a soil amassed by the death of countless living things and are sustained in the lives of the trees.

For Bergson life ascends and matter falls. Life, like fire, is ascendant by nature. Orozco uses fire in this sense, as symbolic of life itself. His work exemplifies the particular intuition Bergson believes is possessed by artists as being able to penetrate into the duration of true reality. Bergson writes,

For hundreds [thousands] of years, in fact, there have been men whose function has been precisely to see and to make us see what we do not naturally perceive. They are artists. What is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness?⁶⁸

Other philosophers, too, like Hegel, believed that the artist has a potentially enhanced ability to express things about truth of reality by tapping momentarily into the universal duration or absolute truth. Hegel believed that art offered a window to the divine, a window to that which is true. He believed that the purpose of art was to illicit feelings universal to all of humanity by which our consciousness might be further

⁶⁷Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (Philosophical Library Inc., 1946; Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1965; reprint, 1975), 109.

⁶⁸Ibid., 159.

developed with understanding becoming aroused in the individual. Hegel's eloquent description of art's purpose is thoroughly fitting for the power of Orozco's images.

[Art's] aim is therefore placed in arousing and animating the slumbering emotions, inclinations and passions; in filling the heart, in forcing the human being, whether cultured or uncultured, to feel the whole range of what man's soul in its inmost and secret corners has power to experience and to create, and all that is able to move and to stir the human's breast in its depths and its manifold aspects; to present as a delight to emotion and to perception all that the mind possesses of real and lofty in its thought--all the splendor of the noble, the eternal and the true; and no less to make intelligible misfortune and misery, wickedness and crime; to make men realize the inmost nature of all that is shocking and horrible, as also of all pleasure and delight; and, finally, to set imagination roving in idle toyings of fancy, and luxuriating in the seductive spells of sense-stimulating visions.⁶⁹

Duration in fact is reality for Bergson, as the duration equals the whole. He believes that we have relied too heavily upon the intellectual faith that reality may be equated accurately to symbolic representations, as if reality is made up of points along the line of time. Our conception of the world is made up from the remnant images, like the Hindu *maya*, created by the activity of universal expansion or creation. These remnants, although useful in providing a common paradigm within which we may evolve, obscure the true nature of reality and its movement.

It has become common in Western thought, whether it be in science, history, or philosophy, that if we isolate the individual moments of this movement or duration we may return them to their proper positions and then contrive a whole, a truth, or an absolute picture of being. Bergson denies this as a vain and misleading attempt which actually stunts our ability to intuit the flow of life which is the *duration*. We create complexity where there should be none. That is not to say that intellectual endeavor itself

⁶⁹J. Glenn Gray, introduction to *Philosophy of History* by G. W. Freidrich Hegel, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Row, 1970), 10.

is in vain; indeed, it is quite necessary for understanding the physical world and enhancing our intuitive abilities, i.e. through history, philosophy, art, science and religion. He believes that in order to use the intellectual knowledge appropriately there must be an intuitive grasp of the movement which sustains us, that is, as Hegel explains, *the union of the particular and the universal*. But, Bergson further argues, that in not realizing each intellectual endeavor has met with the duration--that each has grasped an element of the truth--conflict, confusion, and competition arises between rival schools of thought which is ultimately governing, that is to say, keeping a cap on, the pace of human development which prevents the achievement of real human liberation. With Bergson we can begin to penetrate the individual which might yield a better conceptual grasp over *ever-larger unities of particulars and universals*. This will be further elaborated below.

Bergson's philosophy is geared towards cultivating each individual's innate intuition and one's capacity for action. Particularly, it is within the art of our world cultures that his concept of intuition has its greatest exemplar. The key to unlocking this vault of the absolute is in realizing that all humans intuit; all forms of religion, philosophy, art, literature do, or may, tap into the duration of life, which is the *coming into being* through progressive stages of creation, the *becoming*. Each of these stages has produced individuals who have perceived or glimpsed the absolute, but when it comes to expressing it, individual perceivers are only left with representations and symbols with which to reflect this fleeting association back to others or even to themselves. Bergson illustrates the process by which philosophies become reified and static, moving further and further from their original intuitive realization of the truth of the whole.

He could not formulate what he had in mind without feeling himself obliged to correct his formula, then to correct his correction: thus, from theory to theory,

correcting when he thought he was completing, what he has accomplished, by a complication which provoked more complication, by developments, has been to convey with an increasing approximation the simplicity of his original intuition. All the complexity of his doctrine, which would go on ad infinitum, is therefore only the incommensurability between his simple intuition and the means at his disposal for expressing it.⁷⁰

By studying and uniting the multitude of cultural creations that have come into the realm of possibility, and which offer complex alternative vantage points from which to view the same truth, human intuition may be honed to a more perfected, or self-conscious state. Human intuition is the faculty of accessing one's own experience and history in order to meet the demand of life to act. Just as Hegel insists one must understand the whole (of history) in order to grasp conceptually the dominant forces of the present and thus find truth, Bergson believes that an individual must be able to understand these forces immediately; but he must also be able, at the same moment, to pull those experiences and knowledge of his own history in order to react wisely. But this is extremely difficult with our reliance on intellect alone. As corrupt ideology becomes oppressive to a society, so too does intellectual ossification create a personal static imprisonment, resistant to innovation and change, unable to break one's own mold and create a new one.

Human existence is based upon a system of knowledge, personal and cultural. This system of knowledge is self-perpetuating, as it is a result of the universal becoming or expansion and human memory. As long as we continue to persist, and record it in cultural production and memory, the system automatically expands. Bergson's theories, for example, are a further philosophic elaboration of Friedrich Hegel whose philosophy of history teaches that human evolution or the becoming, the action of the *Zeitgeist* in

⁷⁰G. W. Freidrich Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 128.

Hegelian terms, leaves behind a residue as it progresses through time; he calls this history.⁷¹ For Hegel, each successive culture, empire, dynasty--or any particular people who leave their mark on our present--deposits a bit of itself in the next. In the book *On Art, Religion, and Philosophy*, Hegel writes,

The life of the ever-present spirit is a circle of progressive embodiments, which looked at in one aspect still exist beside each other, and only as looked at from another point of view appear as past. The grades which spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of its present.⁷²

Cultures in conflict have always retained attributes of both victor and vanquished. In China, the barbarian Mongols of the North defeated the Chinese, but wholly adopted the Chinese culture as their own while bringing with them their own unique cultural traits and influence. Likewise, in Mesoamerica, the *Mexica*, who exploited the void left by the fall of the Toltecs, adopted the sedentary agrarian way of life and the Nahuatl language of the peoples they began to conquer. This is the idea of the thesis and antithesis in conflict which results in a resolution by which each has lost or shed the certain ostensibly less perfect or less useful elements of its nature by learning from the experience of struggle thereby creating a more perfect union. This is the synthesis that will ultimately become diametrically opposed to yet another force, thus forming a new dialectic relationship and so on. This theory requires that history is recorded and transmitted somehow, whether in art, religion, philosophy, history or literature, etc.; from this is derived Hegel's idea of *world historical peoples*.

The ultimate goal of Hegel's model of polemic struggle is, if looked at in the proper light, nearly the same as Bergson's. It is the increasing complexity in our system

⁷¹Concepts taken from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*.

⁷²Gray, introduction to *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 10.

of Knowledge, of evolution itself, which is ideally leading to true human liberation and actualized freedom dubbed the Idea by Hegel. Via the action of the *Zeitgeist*, through human creation and evolution, the Idea, or human liberation, will become actualized, i.e. human beings will achieve self-realization, of *being in-and-for-itself* as Hegel would term it, or, for Bergson, human beings are able to intuit the duration of life, merging intellect with intuition. Here it will be helpful to unify parts of the philosophies of Hegel and Bergson. For Hegel the true is in the whole, and for Bergson the truth is in the *duration*. In Hegel we can see a certain solidarity with Bergson. Glen writes of Hegel,

The true is the whole meant for [Hegel] that the apprehension of truth lies in history...The true is a process, not a conclusion; spirit is not a substance, but an activity. This deep-rooted conviction led Hegel to conceive philosophy and to an almost equal extent, art and religion as the history of thought. The active being of anything can be known only by knowing what it has been.⁷³

Furthermore, that which is true in thinking and in reality is discoverable only in the union of the particular and the general (in the sense of genus or universal). Hegel never confuses the general with the abstract, as we so frequently do. The true is the concrete universal, that is, a grasping conceptually of the organic togetherness of particular and universal the universal being the principle or underlying source of the various particulars which flow from this source. The truly concrete universal would be a totality of everything that is and has ever been. But since such a level of concreteness is in fact, if not in theory, impossible for mortals, it is necessary to content oneself with striving for a conceptual grasp of ever-larger unities of particulars and universals.⁷⁴

This concept of self-consciousness is when the individual perceiver, a relative center of perception, becomes aware of the dependent circumstances which ensure the environment in which the individual may express his freedom. Freedom in this sense is not simply being allowed to do whatever you want to--this is essentially always the case--

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

not a freedom simply to do, rather it is freedom from those things which prevent its realization, by subjecting yourself to a moral law. It is the liberation from racism, crime, angst and so on. True freedom as such demands of us an intimate understanding of our dependency on a shared context. For Bergson it is as imperative that all human beings develop their natural ability to intuit the truth of reality as free-willed entities acting within a web of dependent relationships, as it is for Hegel that we find truth in the union of the particular and the universal. Orozco exemplifies what Bergson poetically describes;

Artisans of our life, even artists when we so desire, we work continually, with the material furnished us by past and present, by heredity and opportunity, to mold a figure unique, new, original, as unforeseeable as the form given by the sculptor of clay. Of this work and what there is unique about it we are warned, no doubt, even while it is being done, but the essential thing is that we do it. It is up to us to go deeply into it; it is not even necessary that we be fully conscious of it, any more that the artist needs to analyze his creative ability; he leaves that to the philosopher to worry about, being content, himself, simply to create.⁷⁵

Bergson's philosophy states that everyone is naturally endowed with this intuitive connection to *duration* as everyone is a product and part of it. His doctrine actively admits that all philosophers, artists, playwrights, scientists, etc. have intuited the absolute truth of duration--the flow of life--to varying degrees, but how the individual perceiver is able to express this contact is based completely on the pool of symbolic representations accumulated by personal experience, creating a perspective of absolute uniqueness as a relative center of perception. Implicit in this idea is that everyone has something to offer to the world of possibility and the world of the real. It behooves us all to practice this ability. It is the means by which we evolve and perfect the human spirit. Bergson writes,

⁷⁵Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 110.

Philosophy stands to gain in finding some absolute in the moving world of phenomenon. But we shall gain also in our feeling of greater joy and strength. Greater joy because the reality invented before our eyes will give each one of us, unceasingly, certain of the satisfactions which art at rare intervals procures for the privileged; it will reveal to us, beyond the fixity and monotony which our senses, hypnotized by our constant needs, at first perceived in it, ever-recurring novelty, the moving originality of things. But above all we shall have greater strength, for we shall feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes. By getting hold of itself, our faculty for acting will become intensified.⁷⁶

This faculty for acting is the whole purpose of Hegel's philosophy of history, for only he "who comprehended the past by diligent study and by repeated efforts of the creative imagination could lay claim to understanding the dominant forces of the present."⁷⁷

A Philosophy of History: The outer dialectic

It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts, and fine art is frequently the key--with many nations there is no other--to the understanding of their wisdom and their religion.

G. W. F. Hegel

Duality has been an elemental fact in human existence since the moment of consciousness--man and woman, life and death, night and day, sun and moon, good and evil. We see with two eyes and hear with two ears then process it in two halves of one brain. From these basic and essential phenomena of human reality emerged our ancient sources of wisdom. The concept of duality has been at the root of all the world's great religions and philosophies.⁷⁸ Cultures the world-over have adopted a perspective based

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Gray, introduction to *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 10.

⁷⁸In the Hindu tradition Shiva and Parvati form one complete God. The power he possesses as creator and destroyer may be used for either, for one actually implies the other. The destructive force is a tilling of the earth which invites rebirth and rejuvenation. We see the Yin and Yang in the Chinese cosmology representing masculine and feminine, the two opposing forces from which everything has come and through which everything flows. In Africa, the Yoruba people believe in a spiritual force known as *ashe*.

in duality. It is in the opposition, the duality or the dialectic, of man's nature that the catalyst for change, progress, and evolution exists. And it is through the nature of the dialectic that universality exists in all men. Friedrich Hegel revised and secularized religious dogma through a modern re-conception based in reason, logically and rationally constructing a meaning and an ideal for humanity. His theory of the dialectic is the broad platform from which all here-to-fore Western philosophy springs. In working out his theory of the dialectic, Hegel constructs a Philosophy of History that breaks down all of human development into a simple process of collision between opposites. The thesis and the antithesis conflict with one another creating a synthesis of the two whereby the most prominent traits of each are retained, while also elevating the awareness of its own existence.

The Spirit, devouring its worldly envelope, not only passes into another envelope, not only arises rejuvenated from the ashes of its embodiment, but it emerges from them exalted, transfigured, a purer Spirit.⁷⁹

The synthesis is thereby relieved of weaker and presumably less desirable attributes, however not immune to them. What results is a wider consciousness in having learned from experience.

Hegel's theory makes grasping the seemingly chaotic evolution of human history a matter of logical and necessary design, that is, necessary to achieve true human freedom. Each individual (each particular subjective mind) belongs to and helps to define the essence of his culture, community, people, race, etc. This is the concept of the

This is the force of the universe has a neutral ambivalence that may be manipulated for good or evil. In fact the entire culture is based on an ideal civil balance being achieved and sustained. In Christianity, the polarity of heaven and hell underline its entire philosophy. This idea of duality also exists in Meso-American religious ideology with the idea of cyclic change in which can be seen a unity of past and future events.

⁷⁹Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 79.

Volkgeist (literally folk-spirit), the identity of a people endlessly adapting and advancing as the dialectic dictates. The ultimate goal of this struggle borne by humanity is seen as the achievement of self-consciousness of the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of time), i.e. attaining a self-conscious identity; this is when each individual is aware of his place in space and time as part of a whole--as an intricate piece of a human organism and a reflection of the universal in humanity, when each subjective agent immanently comprehends himself as struggling towards the goal of each and every person, towards a human goal of freedom.

Within this paradigm every historical event, epoch and evolution can be deciphered, all as necessary and good, for the good of all ensuing generations. Only with the passage of time can the conflicts occur that ultimately would shape the evolution of thought in humanity. The world community expands; it encounters itself; it wars and commits atrocities; it wipes out cultures in the name of religion or by pure human greed. But this race of beings also consistently teaches itself and is constantly being reminded and informed of what is right and wrong, good and evil, truth and lie. It is only as we historically encounter the questions of existence that we might progress. Our existence can be neither easily nor quickly reckoned. Just as the trial in ones own life nurture wisdom and learning, the conflict in human past and present feeds the consciousness of those who will follow tomorrow.

Understanding the theory of the dialectic is always most vivid and easily achieved by example, by its application to world historical events and its progressive embodiment, which is what Orozco has done in his murals. The system of dialectical theory is found manifest in its most beautiful and essential form as the most basic human social structure. Man, woman and child represent the most eloquent example of two opposing "forces"

combining into a perfectly synthesized composite, drawing from the best each has to offer as genetic inheritance. The fruits of the loins are, however, only one half of the gift presented to our children. It is the gift of wisdom and knowledge and tradition that truly connects the circle of a “well-rounded” individual. It is the gift of identity. A child raised by loving parents, within a strong community, will be imparted with the knowledge and wisdom and strengths of each. Within a child lives also the essence of two individuals. This concept can be applied to the process in which humanity is imparted with an ever-higher level of consciousness from its antecedents, finally filling in the full identity of man.

The immanent realization about which Hegel and Marx write is the conclusion to humanity's quest for discovering and remaining conscious of its identity. Marx would say this is the state of being in which the present dominates the past, when people have demanded “to give up a condition which needs illusions.”⁸⁰ Paradox is implicit in this process, as it develops in two realms. It is an individual inner struggle that is in absolute control, yet utterly at the mercy, of the outer social struggle of humanity as a whole. Each realm is mutually dependent upon the other, for the spiritual health of an individual needs the defining strength of culture, of background and of communion. Conversely, one cannot hope to have a strong and healthy “national” identity, a *Volkgeist*, if the identities of those comprising it are vague, fragmented or confused.

Conflict between tribes, peoples and nations has forever been burning away the old to make fertile soil for the new. A Phoenix has always emerged rising from the ashes

⁸⁰Karl Marx, excerpt from “Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,” in *Marx and Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S Feuer (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1959), 263. The illusion Marx refers to here is that of religion's “illusory” happiness, the abolition of which is required for “real” happiness.

of human conflict. Seen in the colonial age of Mexico, a most violent and awesome display of the dialectic at work, two alien worlds are thrust into a bloody 500-year quest for assimilation. The history of Mexico is the most remarkable and successful resolution of cultural confrontation from the colonial age.

The story of Mexico is unique in many ways. Prior to Spanish colonization, the peoples of Mesoamerica had evolved a cultural tradition of immense power and depth. Mesoamerica produced a series of highly complex and prolific civilizations. Like Greece or Rome to Northern Europe, the pinnacle of Pre-Columbian social organization rested primarily in Mesoamerica. With the Spanish arrival came the immediate mixing of races. Malinche, the Tlaxcalan woman who divulged the legend of *Quetzalcóatl* to the Spanish, and Cortés, conqueror of the Aztec Empire, stand as symbolic of this primary collision. They were truly the Adam and Eve of Mexico. Here, unlike anywhere else in the Americas, raged a clash of two dominant cultures meeting face to face locked together in a feverish battle to the finish, on a direct path to its resolution. Cortés and Malinche gave birth to a child that has taken a half millennium to reach adolescence.

With the Mexican Revolution and the 20th Century muralist movement, Mexico finally reached the point of self-consciousness, of *Mexicanidad*, an emerging awareness of the self-defined Mexican *Volkgeist*. Paz says the "Mexican Revolution was the discovery of Mexico by Mexicans...the Revolution revealed Mexico to us." The frescoes of José Clemente Orozco present the clearest image to contemporary viewers of the fundamental dialectic engineering involved in the five centuries of construction requisite for fusing (while diversifying) a dynamic new culture. Orozco, like contemporary

cubists, Braque, Stella, or Picasso for example, broke down reality into its most basic ingredients, an intellectual endeavor.⁸¹ Unlike them, however, he gave revealing, timeless truths of universal application in scenes of disturbing expressive realism. Whereas the cubists were interested purely in the visual representation of vital forms, Orozco chose consciously to dissect society intuitively, to expose social reality in its truest universal light. He took the complexity of his world and in extraordinary simplicity reflected back to his people their own tortured souls.

Orozco is not suggesting that the self-realization of the *mestizo* consciousness equates to achieving absolute freedom. On the contrary, he is amplifying his message that it is but a new beginning, a new cycle, the next stage, etc. Life is movement and one must continually fight against the complacency, the apathy, the misanthropy, the oppression and the recalcitrance of ideological, intellectual and institutional atrophy and deceit. Orozco believed like Bergson that revolution is a continuous process that ultimately leads to true freedom.

Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Friedrich Hegel describes the organic development of human consciousness. For Hegel humans are beings the desire to master objects in our physical and living environment. In its first stage human self-consciousness is aware of objects through a desire to consume or master them, to incorporate or destroy them, to negate them in order to assert its own existence and satisfy bodily needs. This will-to-mastery is the basis for the second stage of consciousness in which the self is confronted by another. In this meeting the "principle

⁸¹Bergson attributes human intellect with the purpose of dividing up the seamless flow of reality.

of negation,” the human desire to assert its selfhood through destroying or mastering, presents what Hegel calls the “struggle unto death.” Each independent self is attempting to destroy the other, to assert its being, however, since the object before him is also conscious, killing the other leaves no concrete affirmation of his existence. The self finds that it must instead master the opposing consciousness which has the capacity to acknowledge and express awareness of its defeat and reaffirm the master’s self. Hegel wrote that in the course of human development two opposing forms of consciousness emerge, “one, the independent consciousness, to which being-for-itself is the essence; and the other, the dependent consciousness, to which life or being for another is the essence,”⁸² the master and the servant.

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an attempt to construct a history of human consciousness, the history of human thought. Civilization, or what he calls the “nation-state,” is a reflection of the ideal, the absolute in a state of *becoming*. For Hegel, each civilization that emerges develops through these stages until historical circumstances bring its own destruction. But the spirit persists through the historical evidence it leaves behind. So history might be seen as progressive steps of consciousness. The third stage of consciousness forms a Master/Servant relationship. The master has realized that to make a slave of the other is greater in satisfaction than to kill him. The servant is necessary to the identity of the master. They have formed a relationship of mutual recognition and therefore of dependence.

Objects are the medium through which this relationship and consciousness

⁸²G. F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 177.

evolve, as objects and the desire or need to master them were the genesis of human consciousness, and are therefore symbolic proof of the master's dominance over the servant. The master enjoys the object of desire by using it, consuming it. He disposes of the object by negating it and in the process reaffirms his own being. The *thing* is enjoyed without acknowledging its independence, for he does not see from the perspective of the servant who has produced the object and consequently had to let it go. The servant sees the thing as independent, lasting and enduring. The master has therefore placed the truth of the certainty of himself in the object produced by the inessential consciousness of the servant. Conversely, for the servant, truth is in the master, or the independent consciousness existing for itself. The master negates the object through enjoyment of its use or consumption; the servant negates the object through work. There is no concrete truth left for the master when the object is consumed. For the servant, *work* has the negating power and the object has independent being, endurance, which means that the truth has also these qualities. It is the consciousness that works, that attains as a consequence, a view of independent being as itself.

The master derives great satisfaction for his sense of self in no longer needing to dominate objects directly, but rather in delegating to another that menial task. The master plays no part in the actual mastery of matter. Objects are given to him already transformed by the human hand. He has been cut off from that human activity which first formed his consciousness. In turn, it is the servant who must develop and discover means to manipulate matter and objects. Through this process it is the servant which is gaining a true sense of self-awareness. It is the servant who finds true freedom. It is Hegel's

relationship of matter and labor that is the basis for Marx's Communism. Although Marx rejected Hegel's "bourgeois" *dialectic idealism*, his *dialectic materialism* accepts this methodology as the basis for his class struggle; it is the proletariat, the workers who will achieve true self-consciousness and establish a state of Communism.

"The master never knows truth; if consciousness fashions, or forms, without the initial fear, it is merely a vain sense of self; for its form or negativity is no negativity in itself; and its fashioning cannot therefore give it the consciousness of itself as the essence."⁸³ Being in the position of the master does not allow for the recognition necessary to achieve freedom and true self-realization. Only through subjection, through work and improvement, can consciousness overcome the initial absolute fear, and thus become truth and find freedom.

Once this is achieved, that is, once freedom and truth have been established as a universal egalitarian ideal (philosophically), a final stage in consciousness is achieved, that of reason. A new inner struggle emerges from which stream a perpetual flood of social ills. Hegel and Bergson believe it is necessary to achieve and maintain self-consciousness of these ideas. Bergson's philosophy--often accused of being more poetic than practical--is an attempt to make legible the process by which an individual can be led astray, deceived by intellect and ideology, and then submersed in a sphere of stagnation, destined to repeat over and again the mistakes and setbacks that might otherwise have been retrieved from memory as an instrument of insight-turned-into-action, to more successfully navigate life's demands.

In colonial Mexico we can see the sources for the crisis in the Mexican identity.

⁸³Ibid., 180.

The depth of Orozco's understanding of these past events is what enables him to see the present as concrete reality. His philosophic conception of history, identity, and freedom is as complete and comprehensive as that of Hegel, Marx or Bergson. I agree completely with Paz's assertion that,

Orozco's icon, which contains its own negation, is not a god or an idea but a reality at once present here and now and eternal, universal, and concrete, a reality in perpetual struggle against itself.⁸⁴

⁸⁴Paz, *Essays*, 179.

Chapter 5

OROZCO: ART AND AUTHENTICITY

Orozco remains arguably one of the New World's greatest artists. One of those rare "world historical figures," Orozco transcends his place and time. Endowed with the gift of turning fallacy transparent, Orozco exhibits traits possessed by another remarkable figure, Francisco Goya. Considered by many to be the father of modern painting, Goya was engaged in a campaign to free his people from the oppression of ignorance and superstition by translating in the visual imagery of the artist, the true and simple reality of his world. In many ways Orozco was facing an extension of the same unresolved and exacerbated issues that plagued Goya. For late eighteenth century Spain, the dialectic was at work in the forces of revolution across Europe in the clash of Neo-Classicism and Romanticism, of monarchy versus democracy, and of religion against philosophy and science. It was an era of great turbulence and wondrous intellectual achievement.

A century later, revolution was still actively rising up against similar ills in Mexico. The oppression of a nameless, faceless people was being combated on several fronts. Unification of the Mexican people was an intricate part of this struggle for freedom and humanity. Orozco saw this task as his undeniable destiny; to create a monumental people's art with which to transfer his insight to the disenfranchised in unmistakable language. He brought to Mexicans the tremendous strength of his character and pride, something from which all Mexicans could draw to seal the cracks in their

fractured identities. His dedication to seeking truth and expressing it through painting demanded a strict detachment from the political merry-go-round of the first half of the twentieth century. In the opinion of Fernandez,

It would be wrong to interpret Orozco's work as limited to political interests. No, his great soul, free and generous, knew how to look beyond the immediate circumstance, which was for him only the means to see the deeper and universal human reality.⁸⁵

Marx and Hegel

Karl Marx used the idea of the Master/Servant Dialectic as the basis for his Communist philosophy. The servant workers were the proletariat, the masses who would, once they achieved an awareness themselves and their collective oppression, revolt against the capitalist masters. Marx adamantly refutes Hegel's dialectic idealism in favor of a dialectical materialism.

'My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which under the name of the idea, he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos (creator) of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of the idea. With me on the contrary the idea is nothing else that the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. With Hegel (the dialectic) is standing on its head. It must be turned rightside up again.' In other words, Marx found, in history of the material world of our senses and our working conditions, the source of ideas and the source of conflict and change rather than seeing in the human history of ideas and thought those same sources.⁸⁶

Insofar as these two philosophies are dialectically opposed it seems logical to assume that a synthesis of the two is likely; or perhaps better said, various views that synthesize the poles of Hegel and Marx may be constructed. And I believe that Orozco

⁸⁵Fernandez, *Orozco, University of Guadalajara*, 36.

⁸⁶Roy C. Macridis, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and Regimes*, 4th ed. (Boston: Scott, Foresman and Company, Fourth Edition, 1989), 120.

and Bergson provide a basis for that synthesis. These two realms are so tightly interconnected that neither has sole dominion over the other. This is exactly what Bergson's philosophy is all about, dispelling the belief that any philosophic system is complete, that they all are actually only partial manifestations of truth.

The outer social sphere, one's culture or "nation-state" is a mirror of the human mind. Just as the need for revolution and revolutionary figures exists in the social context, the need for revolution of one's own ideological basis must also be able to break the old mold and create new ones, or risk personal ossification. Orozco's is a united view of Marx and Hegel's philosophic view of history. For from Hegel's point of view the world is an evolution of the battle of ideas, the history of thought. Marx at the other end of the telescope believes it is the phenomenal world, the material reality of social relationships that reveals the fallacy of our perceptions. And like Marx, Orozco and Bergson accepted Hegel's method and went a step further.

Bergson was the first to try to give the term intuition a scientific basis. He transformed and regrounded the static pattern of the older forms of intuitionism by giving it a biogenetic and psychologically dynamic justification. Intuitive knowledge is not limited to the few, is not a private, purely solipsistic affair; but is a general property of all thinking minds. Bergson's conception of intuition represents a fusion of scientific objectivity and artistic directness.⁸⁷

I do not believe that Orozco was anti-Marxist, he was rather certain that the contemporary application of Marxist theory, and the political demon it engendered, namely Stalin, were too far removed from the present reality to ever succeed. Marx died the year Orozco was born, and by the nineteen thirties, when the cycle at Guadalajara was painted, it was clear that Communism, as the last stage in human social relations, was nowhere near occurring. It was also clear the imposition of a temporary pre-Communist

⁸⁷*The Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1942), 37.

state, as seen in Russia, was becoming just as oppressive as the capitalist bourgeois ruling class the proletariat was feverishly attempting to destroy.

Bergson and Orozco believe that it is through the individual who is able not only to be aware conceptually of the traps of ideology in society, but who also has the power to shatter the glass house of their intellect, and, with an intuitive grasp of duration, rebuild it. But that they should also constantly glimpse through the one-way mirror of the soul to their collective sources of identity, as one's social environment is the basis for the individual and one's freedom to act. Once again Fernandez eloquently describes Orozco's philosophy,

His unique and explicit theme is man here and now, a concrete individual, for he knew that to be a man is to be an individual, to take his own and personal responsibility and live, being consumed by fire. There is no need to say that he was not concerned with the isolated individual except in necessary relations with others and with all that constitutes his historic (real) world. Those who detest this individualism hope for others to save them or consume them, either to burn or to save humanity. Orozco condemned himself to movement.⁸⁸

Another component of Hegel's philosophy that Orozco seems to be in agreement with is his idea of the "nation-state." Hegel believed that an egalitarian democracy set up in mutually beneficial relationships with other styles of democratic or republic city- or nation-states would provide the best environment in which to foster self-consciousness and to find freedom. Implicit in this is the role of diversity, and the importance of cultural, ethnic and traditional sources of identity. Orozco's art is an attempt to build the idea of a Mexican nation, of a *mestizo* identity by bringing those sources to light. Even Marx admitted that the revolution of the proletariat might be averted in certain democratic systems of government, as Macridis has pointed out,

⁸⁸Fernandez, *Orozco, University of Guadalajara*, 44.

It is true that at times Marx wavered, and Engels did even more so. On occasions they both conceded that it was possible for well-established democracies, in which the parliamentary system and universal franchise had gained deep root where in other words the superstructure was genuinely democratic to radically transform property relations and socialize the means of production.⁸⁹

Comparing Hegel's ideas with those presented in Orozco's murals seems best adapted for the purposes of a philosophical analysis. Hegel, the father of modern dialectics, is appropriate on many levels. Marx was a Hegelian philosopher, and since his Communist philosophy is the most important influence on the work of the muralists, particularly of Rivera and Siqueiros, the contrast of Hegel and Marx elucidates many of the distinctions between Orozco and his two peers. Orozco knew, as did Rivera and Siqueiros, that the reality of Communism in the Soviet Union was pale in comparison to its stated political and social objectives. Paz points out that both, Rivera and Siqueiros, must have been keenly aware that the artistic freedom each had with respect to both subject and content would never have been allowed in Russia. This is one such element of hypocrisy that elevates the authentic value of Orozco's art above the other two.⁹⁰

The "Tres Grandes"

Orozco began to distance himself from Rivera and Siqueiros shortly after the Syndicate of Painters was established in 1922.⁹¹ Because the latter two so completely embraced an ideology the former could not accept, Orozco positioned himself in

⁸⁹Macridis, *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, 120.

⁹⁰Rivera (a long time Trotskyite) and Siqueiros (a steadfast Stalinist) supported an ideological system that was clearly oppressive as practiced in the Soviet Union, yet continued to extol the virtues Soviet Communism despite this fact.

⁹¹All three artists were among the founding members of the union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, also referred to as the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. It was a collective of allied, progressive-minded artists who advocated a new kind of social art through cooperation, while opposing the rich elite, the bourgeois intellectuals, and the racist tyrants who came in and out of office in organized efforts of creative subversion, public awareness and, often, Communist propaganda.

opposition to Rivera and Siqueiros, and by extension in opposition to Marxism. I am suggesting here that Orozco consciously realized that his work was in many ways the antithesis of Rivera's and Siqueiros's and knew that his work would remain an alternative perspective of Mexican historical development. Octavio Paz's essay on Mexican muralism provides the most succinct description of the differences between the *Tres Grandes*.

Rivera was a painter who possessed many resources, but in my opinion he was an academic painter. His Cubism came from outside, and the same can be said of his other manners and styles. His art does not spring from within himself. In Rivera there is ability, great ability, at times mastery, unquestionable talent, but never, or almost never, passion. Exterior painting, the diametrical opposite of Orozco's. Rivera was an eclectic artist who combined several manners. Instead of inventing, he adapted and combined styles, sometimes with great dexterity.⁹²

As other people are necessary to the understanding of oneself, Rivera provided an antithesis, an example of what Orozco was not. Rivera, simply by being who he was, clearly inspired Orozco to work ever more diligently, to negate the impression Rivera might give the world of Mexican art and identity. A letter dated 23 February, 1928, Orozco wrote to Jean Carlot while in New York expresses his contempt for Rivera and his disgust with the pleasant critical response Rivera's work received in the U.S. Referring to him as Diegoff Riveritch Romanoff, Orozco warns Charlot that the "potentate" Rivera represents a threat to Mexican painters,

...the idea that we are all his disciples is very well entrenched here. To talk about "Indians," "revolution," "Mexican renaissance," "folk arts," "*retablos*," etc., etc., is to talk about Rivera...The "syndicate," (?) and "proletariat," Max. Pacheco, "agrarian reformists," etc., etc., all those words are synonyms of Diegoff...⁹³

In short, Orozco believed that Rivera's work represented not more than an eclectic, but

⁹²Paz, *Essays*, 118.

overly simple, folk art tied to a hollow understanding of Marxist philosophy.

As Hegel's Master Slave dialectic demonstrates, self-consciousness and freedom come through individual labor, the personal mastery and manipulation of matter. One's work is a reflection of one's self. Orozco's art is exceptional precisely because it is wholly a part of his being. It was not compromised by political associations, nor was it watered-down by an incomplete awareness of the self. Orozco's art is an organic extension, an immortal extension of his mortal existence. This is the "authentic" quality of his work that Paz cites to distinguish Orozco from Rivera and Siqueiros. Paz wrote in *Essays on Mexican Art*,

The Russian Dawn, as Waldo Frank called it, brought enlightenment to many consciences in 1924. In accordance with the logic of every millenarianism, a group of Mexican artists shared in those years of a portentous experience: being witnesses to and actors in the Change of Times. Only the divinatory gaze of Orozco perceived, with terrifying clarity, the true reality of the awesome dawn; the other two, Siqueiros and Rivera, became converts to the new idolatry.⁹⁴

Octavio Paz seems to be the first historian to discover that it "is not possible to judge the anarchic Orozco and two ideological artists such as Rivera and Siqueiros by the same criterion."⁹⁵ What separates Orozco from the younger two muralists is what Paz describes as authenticity. In a single paragraph Paz reduces the dynamic relationship of the *Tres Grandes* to its essential elements:

Those works that call themselves revolutionary and that, in the case of Rivera and Siqueiros, give proof of a simplistic and Manichaeian Marxism, were commissioned, sponsored, and paid for by a government that had never been Marxist and that had ceased to be revolutionary. The government allowed artists to paint on the walls of government buildings a pseudo-Marxist version of the history of Mexico, in black and white, because such painting helped to give it the look of being progressive-minded and revolutionary. Populist and progressivist nationalism has been the mask of the Mexican state. As for Rivera and Siqueiros:

⁹³Charlot, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925-1929*, 40

⁹⁴Paz, *Essays*, 147.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 131.

they couldn't have helped but realize that in Mexico they could paint with an independence that they never could have had in Russia. Hence there was a dual complicity, that of government administrations and that of artists. Here again I must make an exception for Orozco. He was the most rebellious and the most independent of these artists; he was probably also the best of them. An impassioned, sarcastic, and religious spirit, he was never the prisoner of an ideology: he was the prisoner of himself. His contradictory and vehement genius made him fall at times into a melodramatic rhetoric, but at other times it sheds radiant light on his work and lends it a moving authenticity.⁹⁶

Orozco's Politics

The productive imagination of the artist is the imagination of a great mind and heart, the apprehension and creation of ideas and of shapes, indeed, the exhibition of the profoundest and most universal human interests in the definite sensuous mould of pictorial representation.

G. F. W. Hegel

That Orozco considered himself an apolitical individual has often been a source of critical debate. He wrote in his autobiography that "no artist has, or ever has had, political convictions of any sort. Those who profess to have them are not artists."⁹⁷ This should not be construed to mean that he did not have a personal philosophy, or convictions, or opinions. Shifra Goldman correctly pointed this out in her book *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*, but she went on to say;

At the same time, Orozco had the typical fear of the bourgeoisie confronted by the masses. To him, they were a blind destructive force that might be utterly barbaric if not checked. Orozco found no redeemers or creative spirits in the lower depths of humanity. There is no dialectical interaction in his works, as there is in Rivera's, between the people and the great men of history. In this sense Orozco is

⁹⁶Ibid., 132.

⁹⁷This statement has been reproduced in almost every book and article on Orozco, in full, or in part. Fernandez responds: "To his authentic liberal sense of human existence corresponds his politics as well; ever truthful, he hated lies and farce, never offered aspirins, and so he could lay about him lustily both left and right. For this reason some have taken him for a destructive anarchist or for a contradictory and negative spirit. One could say that his ideal was Freedom for the Truth, for there can be nothing higher though more difficult, more expressive of his absolute good faith. Liberty and creative action in art were something more than symbols for him; he was never brutalized by politics and only a few understood what he was trying to say when he stated, 'Artists do not have nor have ever had political convictions of any sort and those who believe that they have them, are not artists.' Orozco is an exemplary case of liberty, of the kind that one creates for himself, which he takes, and which he made, and for this (therefore) on seeing his works, the spirit moves freely and goes on through the anguish and horror of this world, consumed by fire, forgetting the body." Fernandez, "Orozco: Genius of America," 144.

Nietzschean. The people are led toward the light unwillingly; they quarrel among themselves in the process. The victims shake their fists toward the heavens in existential despair. Orozco could not, like Rivera and Siqueiros, put aside the middle-class attitudes into which all three had been born and identify himself with their kind of heroic working-class figure.⁹⁸

Although I agree with her conclusion that he does indeed have “theories, opinions, and a moral position,” I must confess my bewilderment with her characterization. It seems almost laughable to contend that Orozco was unable to “put aside middle-class attitudes” while using Rivera in contrast as someone who could (only when it worked to his advantage). Had she said Orozco was unable to put aside “bourgeois idealism,” I might be inclined to agree. If any of the *Tres Grandes* are to be labeled bourgeois, it is most definitely the immodest and opportunistic Diego Rivera, regardless of his hollow advocacy of Communism; for Orozco, Rivera was one of the “false leaders” he fervently attacked in word, painting, and deed. Furthermore Orozco completely denied the validity and efficacy of Communism as a political strategy, and therefore also rejected the ideological poster-child of Marxism, the working-class figure. Goldman also says that Orozco “found no redeemers or creative spirits in the lower-depths of humanity.” I find this a serious misrepresentation of the man and his work. Consider in contrast the words of Luis Cardoza y Aragon;

He loved his people and their customs; he loved nature; he identified with his own country and his own kind, with their pains and sorrows, simply and bravely, without standing in any way aloof from them. The great spirit of Mexico filled all his sails; his words would tumble out in a torrent and his eyes would grow moist whenever he talked of his country. Then that hasty, dry man would become eager child, soaked in fervor, speaking of all that Mexico has suffered and what it must always be, the everlastingness of its profile: he loved his people, in grief or happiness, the people themselves, just the way they were.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Shifra M. Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican painting in a Time of Change* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), 14.

⁹⁹Luis Cardoza y Aragon, “Notes for a Portrait,” introduction to *Jose Clemente Orozco* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1944), 9.

Orozco did not speak idle rhetoric in his works. He did not attempt to use his art as propaganda supporting an already corrupt ideology. Rivera was the epitome of the very bourgeois attitudes that the proletariat was supposed to be rising up against. His lifestyle, without going into any detail, clearly represents the type of self-absorbed decadence bourgeois culture had been accused of.

Goldman further states that “there exists no dialectical interaction in his works, as there is in Rivera’s, between the people and the great men of history.” Again I am confounded. The extent to which Orozco’s work is dialectic has been, as demonstrated earlier, a ubiquitous and fundamental component in analyses of his work. His art is precisely that, a portrait of the dialectical relationship between the revolutionaries, the subsequent false leaders and those who suffer under them. He was simply not convinced that Stalin, for example, is necessarily a “great man of history” as evidenced by his School of Social Research mural which depicts a portrait of the revolutionary Lenin, and his ideological successors--one of whom is Stalin.¹⁰⁰ I would argue that it is indeed his abiding faith in the masses led by a righteous leader that sustained his artistic endeavors. Unfortunately, all leaders are not primarily concerned with the welfare of their followers.

Lastly, Goldman states that Orozco is in a sense Nietzschean, that the “people are led toward the light unwillingly.” Again, I believe Goldman has misread Orozco’s work, for the artist saw his people as naturally being already *in* the light. It is the ideology of the “great men of history,” distorted by the false leaders, that is responsible for leading

¹⁰⁰Stalin is shown below the portrait of Lenin, marching closest to the viewer in rank and file with other “party types.” Stalin is thus shown as the frontrunner of the demagogues vying for power after Lenin’s death. Ghandi, and several other individual figures are also depicted, surrounded by several smaller figures.

them astray, for preventing them from realizing they are actually “light” themselves. In this case I must agree with Fernandez when he says:

For some short-sighted persons, his work has a negative emphasis, because their attention is fixed on its wretched aspects and they do not see the sublime, vital and positive features it contains. Orozco’s greatness consists in his sharp conscience, in his intuition of what is real, and in his prodigious creative artistic capacity.¹⁰¹

Although rather idiosyncratic, Orozco was a man of truly impeccable character, a man of sincere modesty and a man tortured by images of his people's self-destruction. His philosophy of life could not be party to any of the ill-fated political factions of his contemporary Mexico. No allegiance could be made to either of the extremes that fluctuated in and out of power because none could ever get past the issue of race and revenge. In his autobiography, Orozco describes the situation in his contemporary Mexico:

Like victims of amnesia we haven't found out who we are. We go on classifying ourselves as Indians, Creoles and mestizos, following blood lines only, as if we were discussing race horses, and the effect of the classification is to divide us into implacable partisan groups, the Hispanists and the Indigenists, who war to the death.¹⁰²

Orozco remained outside of that myopic mentality while painting his walls of mirror. This being understood, the art of this great master is unambiguous and passionately overflowing with meaning. Orozco was not exclusively anti-revolution, not anti-Indian, nor anti-Spanish, rather he sought to learn from these histories and experiences in order to help heal and understand the present, and further to establish an ideal for Mexico’s future. He was a man of fantastic perspective who tirelessly warned of the dangers posed by ideology tainted by simplistic interpretation and criticism. “In

¹⁰¹Fernandez, *Orozco*, *University of Guadalajara*, 36.

¹⁰²Jose Clemente Orozco, *An Autobiography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 104.

many respects Orozco espoused a philosophy of human conduct that demanded of political leaders a broad humanism.”¹⁰³ Seated high above the chaos that surrounded him, existence and outlook were not confined to his environment or orientation, for Orozco had an overarching world-view. He was concerned solely with rooting out in visual form the essence of the unjust and capricious activities of man, removing the veil of ignorance and resignation of the oppressed to glimpse the divine in man. His work is an assault on the senses which challenges and exposes the wanton, greedy nature of a society whose ideals have been corrupted by the pursuit of a few for self-gain.

The history of Mexico is a story of epic importance. Orozco saw the world as slave to the issue of race. The history of man had been but one story of barbarism told time and time again. He speaks of the pride all races have “in the extreme.” “The racial thesis, or theory, when applied to the exclusion of any other, works serious harm.”¹⁰⁴ Trapped in a gravity of infinitely destructive orbits, each offended race awaits “a day of revenge, which may come sooner or later, without fail, and then the victims of yesterday will be the victors of tomorrow.”¹⁰⁵ In his Mexico, Orozco saw a nation that had accomplished nearly nothing on the issue of race in 400 years of bitter, bloody conflict. All people in his homeland were, for him, still chained to the wall that separated the established racial hierarchy. Orozco continues,

At any given moment the Conquest looms more immediate than the forays of Pancho Villa. The attack upon the Great Teocalli, the Noche Triste, and the destruction of Tenochtitlan did not take place early in the sixteenth century, but just last year.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Joyce Waddell Bailey, “Jose Clemente Orozco (1883-1949): Formative Years in the Narrative Graphic Tradition,” *Latin American Research Review* 15;3 (1980): 79.

¹⁰⁴Orozco, *Autobiography*, 30.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

In Mexico we see an allegory of man's history. It is the universal struggle of humanity to overcome a most essential and complex dilemma, racism. Here, again, we face paradox. It is our pride of race that has nurtured human magnificence. In the modern world race or ethnicity have established an identity with which to contrast and define the individual, employing skills and experience which liberate the mind to expose man's reason and creativity to evolution and enlightenment, even at the expense or exclusion of other races. At some point, however, this necessary racial basis transforms into humankind's greatest dilemma. The catalyst becomes constrictor. The final step to the next stage of development is the most difficult challenge posed to humanity. What Orozco so poignantly depicts in his murals is the nature of Mexico's unfolding, the paradox of human existence resolving itself in an ever-widening context. We glimpse within the particular event our universal condition.

Orozco was a man with a philosophy of life, a life ethic. The politics of contemporaneous Mexico were of no use to him. He held a high standard for himself that he felt should extend to each individual. He did not profess one thing and perform another. Upon reading dozens of biographical sketches one thing becomes apparent, the absolute sincerity of this artist undeniable. No political ideology or agenda is to be found within his art, as is so overtly found filling the work of both Diego Rivera and Siqueiros. With these latter two muralists, one needs to know the doctrine of Communism to fully understand or critique the meaning of their works. Orozco's art requires no such background, as it is not tied to ideology, but to an ideal.

However passionately he felt he makes no personal revelations, either in paint or print. He does not participate in recrimination or in resentment on a personal basis; his feelings were much more abstract, and he took positions based on principle rather than become involved personally in the issue. Orozco, like

Balzac, saw a vast human comedy, gay and diverting, but one on which he takes no editorial position.¹⁰⁷

Orozco's pride and self-confidence are the pillars of his strength. This is precisely what he saw as lacking in his people, a foundation on which to employ their individual and collective power. Orozco drew upon the sources of his strength, his family, his heritage and his environment. Knowing himself to be, as a true Mexican man, the product of two worlds, he was both proud of and disturbed by the origins of his being. He came to see the revolution, and perhaps all revolution, as the apocalyptic sentence each civilization must serve for past misdeeds and dereliction of duties to self and to others. This notion is expressed in sensual form on the dome at Hospicio Cabañas, in Guadalajara. Mexico served as a real life purgatory where the sins of the reborn were to be incinerated by the cleansing fire of transcendence before passing into the final fusion of what Vasconcelos called the *Cosmic Race*. In the violent turmoil of the dialectic, synthesis sheds the failures and offenses of both cultures thereby liberating the newly emerging Mexicans from that which had forever enslaved their ancestors.

Orozco's politics, if they must be defined, are dialectical and idealist in nature. Were he pushing a platform, it would espouse that the Mexican people rise above their narrow perspectives, and behold their magnificence and potential. They must celebrate the past as a path from which all have emerged, wiser and more self-aware than any culture yet known to man, for they are a liberated race, the race who would inherit a new reign of the thirteen heavens as established by the return of *Quetzalcóatl*. For Orozco, the conquest and the revolution were the fulfillment of this prophesy, the necessary obliteration of the barbaric tendencies of each race, of the human race. *Quetzalcóatl*

¹⁰⁷Ibid. introduction, xxii.

vowed to return in the skin of a white man. And, it may be said, he did return, first as Cortés, then as Jesus, as Spaniard and as Catholic. *Quetzalcóatl* is the Mexican Prometheus, once again bringing enlightenment, and the gift of transcendent consciousness.

His view of what might be, were his people to finally embrace who they are rather than trying to destroy what they believe they are not, is the climatic scene depicted in the dome of the Cabañas chapel. Here are Orozco's philosophy, his politics and his hope. Here he turns the lessons of the past into the actualization of Mexico's potential future splendor, and, indeed, the true majesty of the human-race. It must be kept in mind that anything Orozco wants for his people, he also wants for all people. He sees the Mexicans as a "world historical" people, as an example to the world of a new order based on *simpatia*, pride, and diversity. This new order being the development of a *volkgeist*, the construction of an identity based in the universality of human spirit rather than clinging to the old identity fragmented and stunted by race.

CONCLUSION

The revived medium of European fresco and the renaissance of indigenous mural painting offered the early twentieth century artist a powerful medium to convey tremendously complex subject matter. It is interesting to note that herein the dialectic is again at work. The classical context of fresco joined with the pre-Columbian narrative muralism in an artist who was endowed with an innate ability to focus on his reality with eyes of both a Spaniard and an Indio, as a Mexican--an artist who could exploit and synthesize the two traditions--liberating the modern painter from the confines of the easel.

Mural painting began under auspices. Even the errors it committed were useful. It broke with the routine into which painting had fallen. It disposed of many prejudices and served to reveal social problems from a new point of view. It liquidated a whole epoch of brutalizing Bohemianism, of frauds who lived the life of a drone in their ivory towers--their fetid dens--where drunkenly strumming on their guitars, they kept up a pretense of absurd idealism, beggars in a society that was already rotten and close to extinction.¹⁰⁸

In one work of art Orozco could achieve his highest aspiration of creating a people's art by taking on the theme of their identity, its historical struggle and resolution. Orozco knew well that a new authentic Mexican art, offered as an alternative to European modernism, must be accessible for it to function. With this new conception of art, he could truly begin to fulfill a role in awakening his people, to give them the means to overcome this burden of racial polarity. He trusted unconditionally the power of painting when wrested in the hands, or hand, of a true artist. Reed explains Orozco's faith in art,

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 88.

Orozco believed in the efficacy of painting as a medium for interpreting both the physical and the spiritual world. All of his panegyrics were reserved for painting, which he hailed as the complete art, superior to all other arts. He often told me that through painting alone, the artist who 'knew enough' would be able to analyze natural phenomena and penetrate cosmic mysteries...The moral flows from an Orozco painting as inevitably as it flows from human existence.¹⁰⁹

For Orozco the highest realization of the painting medium was achieved in fresco. Fresco allowed Orozco to fully articulate his philosophic beliefs like no other medium could. The cycle of images in the *Hospicio Cabañas* leads the viewer through the vital nature of Mexico's past, piecing together a sensual depiction of Mexico's spiritual evolution. In the process, however, he makes it explicitly clear that it is impossible and unwise to seek a return to either the pre-Columbian or the Colonial epochs of Mexican history.

Orozco's alternative modernism embarks on a journey seeking to expose truth. This fresco series at the *Hospicio Cabañas* is a monumental portrait of those aspects that have fashioned his world. Its brilliance presents a portrait of an entire people, while also describing the personal struggle we all face. Undertaking a task of such enormous scale requires exceptional comprehension of the manifold interrelations of history and culture and self. The magnitude of this work is arguably unrivaled. Only with this amount of wall space does the possibility of a people's portrait become realizable. Orozco injects into his revolutionary art an understanding of his time and people, and of himself, which might otherwise require years of research and reading to attain. Here is an example like no other of the power, the mystical expression of art. Encoded within these images is a language that surpasses, goes beyond total apprehension, yet is universally recognizable.

¹⁰⁹Reed, *Orozco*, 49.

It travels through hidden networks in our system of consciousness, imparting an enriched insight and understanding of ourselves.

From its very inception, this paper has had but one goal: to resuscitate an often vilified and nearly forgotten man. Orozco's murals have lost little of their impact and immediacy in our day. It is especially with the fall of Soviet Communism that a reconsideration of Orozco's artistic genius must be undertaken. He has often been overshadowed by the girth of Rivera's reputation and renown, even referred to as a student of Rivera. However, a simple preliminary investigation of Orozco's work reveals this to be total fallacy.

Orozco seems to only rarely appear in the surveys of Western art. It is unfortunate that he is not often enough placed within that tradition as a pivotal figure in art historical influence and innovation. Although the impact of Orozco's art on later Mexican artists and movements has been investigated by some Mexican scholars, his influence on Abstract Expressionism, his interaction with the New York Intelligencia, with Thomas Benton, his influence on Chicano community mural painters, these things have not attracted much attention. He is by all accounts a thoroughly Western painter. And beyond that, he is an American painter who sees with that liberated American spirit, who rises with life above the quagmire of human past. He decided to be free, and expressed his freedom through his art. In so doing, Orozco leaves a visual philosophic understanding of the vital universal process of his own being. He is a man who to a great extent achieved the type of freedom Hegel and Bergson describe. Orozco fits absolutely those descriptions of the power and purpose of art that they exalt. It takes two points to make a connection, but it takes three to make a circuit. Orozco fits in dialectic opposition

with Rivera, who stood in opposition to Siqueiros. By studying the three together one better understands the individuals. Likewise, Orozco completes the circuit of the Bergsonian and Hegelian conceptions of human development and reality.

This paper has been written in the spirit of these philosophies. It has meant to exemplify how we may link particulars and universals, and of how the unification of knowledge as described by Hegel can be approached. From three subjective centers comes a unification of thought and action. Each acts as an archetype of the liberated man, the revolutionary man, the creative man who sees the human world as an organism, a collective of independent beings, slowly progressing through life and experience, struggling to achieve that elusive and ambiguous ideal of freedom.

Within the particular man, visions of his own world merged into his philosophic system. Due to Orozco's deep empathy with human struggle he is able to transform the story of his people, through this fresco series, into the story of all people. It is the union of Hegel's particular and universal, in which we may see the truth of a particular reality by virtue of its universality. *The truth is in the whole.* Orozco knew this intuitively. He saw in his people a composite, an amalgamation fused together by the events of the Mexican past. In this work Orozco paints ever-larger *unities of particulars and universals*.¹¹⁰ He paints the individual struggle of man who faces the necessity to do and to live, which is borne out in his life and work. He shows us historically how truly

¹¹⁰Gray, introduction to *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, 13. "The true is the idea...The *idée* is not something simply in men's heads (in the way either mental images or concepts are) but a form of structure of reality, plus more or less adequate awareness of it. The idea is the ideal union of objective reality in its essential features with the human world of thought. To become truly actual or realized, the external world must be assimilated to a kind of thinking that eschews all accidental properties of a subject and penetrates to the essential and enduring substance in process. Hegel calls this kind of thinking absolute knowing or science. It is far removed from sense perception or mental representation or imaging, though all these activities are lower stages of the act of conception, by which true union of subjective and objective realities, thinking and being, is brought about."

dependent we are on those past events for identity, and how man as civilization, or society, or nation has progressed towards freedom through an assertion of the self and its will. The individual artist within a particular epoch must understand the sources of his origin in order to grasp conceptually the dominant forces of his present. Orozco, like few others, is able to capture these forces and mold them into an expression of universal solidarity, without hollowly relying on a ready-made philosophic ideology. He vehemently attacks ideology as being doomed to stagnation and rigidity because the practitioners, as exemplified by Rivera, are all too often unable to carry out “a thorough radical criticism of their attitudes.”¹¹¹ It is ironic that the least Marxist of the *Tres Grandes* was the same one who demonstrates in his painting the clearest understanding of its comprehensive philosophy.

In comparison to other American Masters,¹¹² and most certainly to their European counter-parts, José Clemente Orozco seems to have been given but brief and cursory attention in our time. Perhaps it is believed that everything that can be said about Orozco has been said. Perhaps he is disregarded as a confused and naïve idealist. Has he simply been forgotten, along with the walls once decorated by WPA artists--individuals ostensibly suffering from the same idealist naivete--painted over as if an obsolete propaganda opposed to the post-World War II individualism of the United States, his work lumped into the fold of the relatively hollow social realism of the WPA? It may be that his murals take on a theme of Mexico deemed too foreign, too far removed. Or perhaps he has become lost in the deep shadow of Rivera, as much of Mexican art has. In

¹¹¹Paz, *Essays*, 156.

¹¹²Again I am using *American* in a Pan-American sense, although Mexican (and Latin American) painters in general are not often included in the Western canon of the masters. But Orozco, even in comparison to other Mexican painters, like Rivera, has received little attention from scholars.

much of the literature concerning Orozco and his life and work, some specter of concern compels admirers to emphasize the future worth and efficacy that would be discovered and understood by later scholars far removed from the immanence of the period. They believed in the universality and power of Orozco's art, in the message his works conveyed to viewers. They could not possibly have predicted, however, the extent to which art would shrink and shrivel in the heat of new media. They certainly would not have believed that fifty years after his death Orozco would remain marginal, often half-understood, under-estimated and virtually uncelebrated outside Mexico.

This project has been an attempt to acknowledge and recognize the contributions of José Clemente Orozco to our understanding of the Mexican Revolution and the identity of its people, to elevate and distinguish his work from the clutter of the period, and to articulate the significance and universality of his artistic endeavors. His deeply philosophic painting speaks to us as boldly today, and with as much pertinence, as it did to Mexican's during his lifetime.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Figures



Figure 1. Interior of the Cabañas Institute



Figure 2. The Indigenous World



Figure 3. Coatlique



Figure 4. The Conversion



Figure



Figure 5. The Confusion of Religions



Figure 6. Cortés



Figure 7. Conquistadors Fighting Amongst Themselves



Figure 8. The Two-Headed Horse



Figure 9. The Mechanized Horse



Figure 10. Triumph of Death



Figure 11. Triumph of Death



Figure 12. Triumph of Death, Pieter Breughal



Figure 13. Philip II



Figure 14. The Militarized Masses



Figure 14. The Military Parade



Figure 15. The Demagogues



Figure 16. The Human Spirit

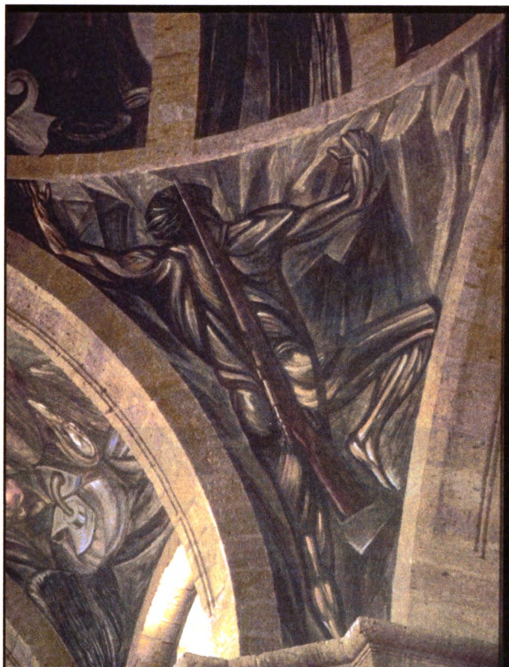


Figure 17. The Human Spirit



Figure 18. Elemental Man



Figure 19. Dome



Figure 20. The Wounded

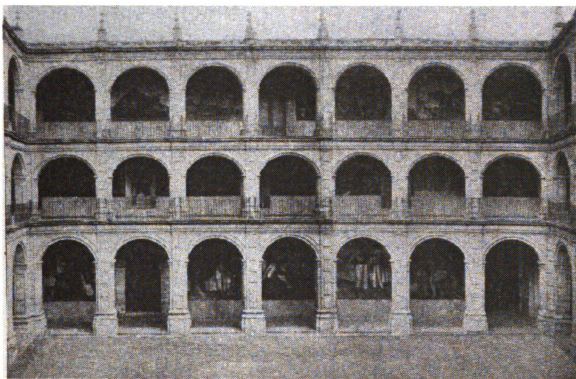


Figure 21. The National Preparatory School



Figure 22. Driftwood



Figure 23. Omniscience



Figure 24. Murals of Orizaba



Figure 25. Cortés and Malinche



Figure 26. The Rich Banquet While the Workers Quarrel



Figure 27. Maternity



Figure 28. The Trench



Figure 29. The Revolutionary Trinity



Figure 30. Prometheus



Figure 31. Dartmouth College Murals



Figure 32. University of Guadalajara Murals



Figure 33. Father Hidalgo



Figure 34. The Carnival of Ideologies

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Excerpts from Notes on the Preparatory Murals

Painting in its higher forms and painting as a minor folk art differ essentially in this: The former had invariable universal traditions from which no one can separate himself for any reason, in any country, and in any epoch. The latter has purely local traditions that vary according to the life, the changes, agitations, and convulsions of each people, each race, each nationality, each social class, and even each family or tribe.

To confuse the one with the other is a serious error, to apply the one the laws that govern the other is a regrettable mistake because it denaturalized it and disorients and confuses the collectivity, causing a delay in its aesthetic development. ...

Each race will be able to make, and will have to make, its intellectual and emotional contribution to that universal tradition but will never be able to impose on it the local and transitory modalities of the minor arts...

True nationalism must not consist in this or that theatrical costume or even in this or that popular song of more than doubtful merit, but in our scientific, industrial, or artistic contribution to human civilization, and the painter who works in the Italian tradition of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, is more of a nationalist than the one who goes crazy over the nationalistic pots and pans that are very suitable for decorating kitchens but not drawing rooms, and even less libraries or laboratories...

All aesthetics, of whatever kind, are a movement forward and not backward....

The real work of art, like a cloud or a tree, has absolutely nothing to do with morality or immorality, with good or evil, with wisdom or ignorance, or with virtue or vice. A mountain that springs up has nothing of that, and thus must plastic or musical or literary expression spring forth, like anything that is born of the impulse of natural forces and in accordance with their laws. A painting should not be a commentary but the fact itself; not a reflection but light itself; not an interpretation but the thing to be interpreted. It should not connote any theory or be an anecdote, story, or history of any kind. It should not contain opinions about religious, political, or social matters: absolutely nothing but the plastic fact as a particular, concrete, and rigorously precise case. It must not arouse in the viewer any pity or admiration for the objects, animals, or persons of the theme. The only emotion it must generate and transmit must be that which is derived from the purely plastic, geometric, coldly geometric phenomenon, organized by a scientific technique. Everything that is not purely and exclusively the plastic, geometric language, subjected to the inescapable laws of mechanics, expressible by an equation, is a subterfuge to conceal impotence, is literature, politics, philosophy, what you will, but not painting, and when an art loses its purity and is denaturalized, it degenerates, becomes abominable, and finally disappears.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

Orozco the Artist: A Chronology

Reproduced from: *J.C. Orozco en el Instituto Cultrual Cabañas*. Introductions by Luis Cardoza y Aragón and Teresa del Conde. Guadalajara: Instituto Cultural Cabañas, 1993

- 1883 He is born on November 23th in Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco. Second son of Irineo Orozco and Rosa Flores a couple with good economic standing being owners of a sopa, dyes and ink factory and a printing and bookbinding workshop.
- 1885 Family moves to Guadalajara where they live in a house which is, according to Orozco "very good but modest if compared with the mansion we had at Zapotlán" (Zapotlán is Ciudad Guzmán's former name). Guadalajara's house was located in front on San Felipe Church. They remain five years in this city.
- 1890 Due to unexpected economic difficulties, the Orozco's move to Mexico City. They live in a very simple house at Hospicio de San Nicolás Street (today the street is named República de Guatemala). José Clemente goes to the Elementary School dependent from the School of Education, at Licenciado Verdad Street. He meets José Guadalupe Posada who works in the famous Venegas Arroyo printing workshop where Orozco will receive the first stimulus for his artistic career and a "revelation" of the existence of the art of Painting". He goes to the night shift at San Carlos Academy. Following his family wishes he enters into the Agricultural School at San Jacinto and for three years he attends the courses needed to become an Agricultural Technician.
- 1900 He is admitted in the National Preparatory School where he remains for four years. Plans to study Architecture. During a lab experiment accidentally causes an explosion that ruins his left hand and leaves his sight and hearing impaired.
- 1904 "Obsession with Painting" leads him to abandon the Preparatory and he intends to return to San Carlos Fine Arts Academy; he is now convinced of his calling.
- 1907 His father dies and young Orozco has to work as a draftsman at "El Imparcial"(a Mexico City newspaper), in order to support his architectural studies.
- 1908 He enters the Academy of Fine Arts to study painting; takes the course given by the Spanish teacher Antonio Fabrés; among the students of Fabrés he meets Diego Rivera.
- 1909 He follows drawing with Germán Godovius and Leandro Izaguirre. Meets Jesús Ibarra, director during the Revolution of the political newspaper "Acción" and one of the leaders of the student's strike in 1911-1913 at the Academy.
- 1910 He participates in the Collective Show of the Fine Arts Academy organized on account of the Independence Centennial with some charcoal drawings.
- 1911 Starts working as a cartoonist for "El Hijo del Ahuizote". Beginning his water color series "Casa de Lágrimas" ("House of Tears").
- 1912 Goes on with "House of Tears" series; he gathers some 123 studies of women (water color, pastel ink, oil on paper) and a significant number of thew works deal with the red-light district atmosphere.

- 1914 Orozco is chosen by Dr. Atl to form part of the groups in charge of distributing among the poor the money from the National Treasury.
- 1915 Collaborates as a cartoonist for "La Vanguardia", a newspaper founded by Dr. Atl at Orizaba. He paints his first painting in a large format "The Last Spanish forces honorably evacuating San Juan de Ulúa Castle."
- 1916 First one-man show; it takes place at "Biblos Bookshop" gallery in Mexico City (the gallery director is Francisco Gamoneda). He exhibits in the gallery of Francisco Navarro his "Estudios de Mujeres" ("Studies of Women") from the "House of Tears" series. He decorates the "Los Monotes" cafeteria, owned by his brother. ("monote" means "big monkey" but also an informal clumsy drawing of a human figure as made by children or as people later claimed, by the muralists. N. of T.).
- 1917 Not finding in Mexico a favorable ambiance for the arts, Orozco travels for the first time to the United States. At Laredo, Texas, sixty of his drawings are destroyed on charges of immorality. Orozco settles in San Francisco to paint, Fernando R. Galvin is his dealer. Travels to New York, visits Niagara Falls and, later, is deported from Canada.
- 1918 Orozco comes back to Mexico.
- 1920 Paints his mother's portrait "Doña Rosa Flores, viuda de Orozco." Alongside with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Caso, Diego Rivera and Enrique Delhumeau, among others, forms the Solidary Group with the Working Movement, whose goal was to interest intellectuals in worker's problems; sent by the Group, Orozco travels to Morelia and Guadalajara. Beginning of his murals at the large court in the National Preparatory School; erases his first sketches: "The Elements", "Man's Struggle against Nature", "Failing Man" and "Christ destroys His Cross". From the initial plan he preserves only "Maternity" and a Head of Christ later to be used in "The Strike". He paints "The White House" (today in the Carrillo Gil collection).
- 1923 He signs the Manifesto proposed by the Union of Painters, Sculptors and Engravers. Marries Margarita Valladares.
- 1924 "International Studio" a New York magazine, the article "Orozco, the Mexican Goya" by José Juan Tablada is published; the article is illustrated with drawings from "The House of Tears" series. After the resignation of José Vasconcelos as Minister of Public Education, Orozco and Siqueiros are hurled onto the street by the students and the murals are seriously damaged with sticks, stones and knives. Collaborates in "El Machete", newspaper published by the Union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico. His son José Clemente is born.
- 1925 Paints the al fresco mural "Omniscience" on the staircase of the House of Tiles, popularly known as "Sanborn's" in Mexico City. An exhibition of his work is presented in the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in Paris.
- 1926 Supported by the Rector, Doctor Alfonso Pruneda, he takes up again the suspended murals at the Preparatory; but again work is interrupted. Paints in two weeks a 100 square meter mural in the Industrial School of Orizaba, Veracruz; this mural is named "Social Revolution". His son Alfredo is born. Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier publishes in "Social" a magazine printed in Havana the article

"The Art of Clemente Orozco"; illustrated with various murals later destroyed, among them "Man" (Man annihilating the Past, Man triumphantly advancing towards the Future, Man the Multiple singing a hymn of power and joy. Another mural described by Carpentier and later destroyed by Orozco are "The Dance of Death of contemporary life, its pathetic moments and its intense conflicts'. When Orozco is not pleased with one of his works he destroys it. In he knifed several frescos which, fortunately were photographed in time. He paints "Soldaderas" ("soldaderas" were the revolutionary soldiers' women who followed them everywhere); the canvass is at the National Museum of Visual Arts in Mexico City.

- 1927 Finally the Preparatory mural is finished. This work includes "The Strike", "Destruction of the Old Order", "The is Trench", "The trinity, peasant, soldier, worker," "The New Ideals", "The Undertaker", "Farewell", "Revolutionaries", "The Origin of Spanish America Cortés and Malinche", "The Indian World", "Builders" and "Evangelization". His daughter Eugenia Lucrecia is born. Travels to New York thanks to Genaro Estrada, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who gives Orozco money for three months.
- 1928 He meets Alma Maria Sullivan (Alma Reed), journalist and correspondent for "The New York Times"; he also meets Eva Sikelianos engaged in the Greek nationalist movement and Sarojini Naidu, Ghandi collaborator and head of the committee to help the Indian movement against the British. He also met French novelist Henri Barbusse. He is symbolically adopted as a son of Greece by Doctor Kalimakos, Patriarch of the Greek Church in New York and director of the Greek Daily National Herald; he is crowned with laurel leaves and baptized as "Panselenos", a famous Greek painter of the Byzantine period. He sells ten drawings from the series "Mexico in Revolution to Mrs. W. Force ' of the Whitney Museum for 35 dollars each, among the drawings we note: "Dead Comrade", "In Vain", "An Aristocrat Dances", "Battlefield Nr. I "Neans and Tortillas" and "The Reactionary." In a private house (12 Fifth Avenue) the first exhibition of Orozco in America takes place. Later his temperas from " Mexico in Revolution" art shown at Marie Sterner Gallery (9,57th East Street). Orozco meets Leon Underwood, a British painter and engraver. His circle of American friends at the time include, among others, the poet Charles Leonard Van Noppen, art critic Claude Bragdon, Doctor Kalimakos and philosopher Emily S. Hamblen. Meets poet Juan José Tablada. He is a regular customer of Tovar, a Mexican Restaurant (58,109th West Street) he goes them usually accompanied by Alma Reed, Madame Naidu and two or three more friends; this restaurant is also visited Frequently by poets Syud Hossain and Jalil Gibran who was to become extremely popular.
- 1929 Orozco proves himself as a writer in English; he publishes "New World, New Races and New Art," illustrated with 3 reproductions: the Franciscan Panel from the al fresco paintings at the Preparatory and two temperas: "Requiem" and "The Flag", from the series "Mexico in Revolution"; the article expresses Orozco's rejection of folklorism. Starts painting a profile portrait of Alma Reed; she suggests Orozco open gallery in New York to show and sell his work; they hire a place at 57th Street and name the gallery "Delphic Studios". His oil painting

“Revolution” is shown at a collective exhibition of Mexican painters of the time at The Art Center on 55th Street, under the patronage of Frances Flynn Paine. About this show, Orozco wrote: “It has left Mexican art in completest ridicule”. An Orozco show takes place in the Little Gallery of the New Student’s League, in Philadelphia. Dorothy Grafly writes in the “Ledger”: “Depth of soul should rise over simple technique and imagination contrasts in Orozco”. He exhibits in “Downtown Gallery”; the catalogue presents eleven oil paintings and two drawings from the series produced in New York; besides “Coney Island: Side Show” the series of pictures -small and medium size- include “Street Corner”, “Queensboro Bridge”, “Fourteenth Street”, “Elevated No. 1” “Elevated No. 2” and “Workers”. There are some comments in the newspapers: Elizabeth Luther Cary’s in The New York Times and Margaret Bruening’s in The Post. His drawings from “Mexico in Revolution” are shown in the gallery “Fermée la Nuit” in Paris, this show takes place thanks to Madame Sikelianos. He exhibits in the Art Student League of New York; the catalogue includes 113 works not included in other American exhibitions; he presents new paintings, anatomical drawings and the complete temperas from “Mexico in Revolution”, photographs from Mexican Murals, three lithographs made that year and a study in Vaudeville ovals over a Harlem theatre show. Young people acclaim “Subway No. 1” which is purchased by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr. for five hundred dollars; favorable critical features are published in The New York Times, Herald Tribune, and The New York Sun; in the Sun’s article critic Henry McBride emphasizes the value of mural painting. Orozco receives in New York the magazine “Bandera de Provincias” (“Provincial Banner”) published in Guadalajara; there, José Guadalupe Zuno wrote “Orozco is a real revolutionary, who does not copy, without cubist patches. Whoever knew his cartoons twenty years ago finds his present work very logical. Very Mexican, very modern, very Jalisco”. He receives Cahiers d’Art, the most important French art magazine where Christian Zemos writes about Orozco’s show at “Fermée la Nuit” Gallery. He produces a new series: “Park Avenue Types” and a color sketch called “Lucky People”, an acid comment on the spiritual sterility of wealth as well in American society. “Idols Behind Altars” a book by Anita Brenner contains a chapter on Orozco which was the first full recognition of his value written in English; this book explains the past of the artist. José Clemente lives through the economic depression in New York. “Mexico in Revolution” drawings are shown in Chicago’s Art Institute thanks to an invitation by Dr. Harshe. Among the painters that get acquainted with Orozco in New York we find: Marsden Hartley, Clifton G. Newell, Thomas H. Benton, Boardman Robinson, Jean Chariot, Olle Nordmark, Dewey Albinson, Katharine Breen and Eloise Schwab. He meets writers Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford. The Mexicans who came to see Orozco were Jaime Torres Bodet (diplomat, later Minister of Education and Director of Unesco); Genaro Estrada (also a diplomat and poet); Luis Barragán (one of Mexico’s greatest architects and like Orozco, born in Jalisco State); Alberto Rembao (director of the Spanish Bureau of the Foreign Language Information Service) who wrote several articles on Orozco for The Interpreter; Juan de Dios Bojórquez, (politician and writer).

- 1930 Exhibits at Delphic Studios, New York. In order to raise funds for the mural in Pomona College (Claremont, California) students issue an "al fresco edition" of the school's magazine *"Student Life"* including photographs of Orozco murals and a portrait of the artist done by Doris Ullman. He paints "Prometheus" in Pomona College at the request of Art History Professor José Pijoan and his friend Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna. Paints in San Francisco the canvas "Zapata entering a peasant house". Back in New York City, he begins his mural "The Table of Universal Brotherhood" for the New School for Social Research; in this mural he painted people from all races, presided by a black and surrounded by revolutionary leaders: Lenin, Gandhi and Carrillo Puerto; in this mural Orozco follows the geometric aesthetic principles of Jay Hambridge, whose basic findings tried to relate the measurements and proportions found in natural shapes and in: Greek art. Edward Weston takes a portrait of Orozco. Exhibit of the series of lithographs in the Museum Exhibition Park, Los Angeles, California. Paints "Zapata", his greatest canvas painting (permanent collection of the Chicago Art Institute).
- 1931 Completes the murals at the New School for Social Research; he is helped by the young artist Louise Wilcox. Stephen C. Clark from the Museum of Modern Art commissions Orozco to paint several large pictures-, the first painting is to be a development from the tempera "Cemetery" originally acquired by Stephen C. Clark himself. Thanks to a down-payment of 2.500 dollars, Orozco is able to send for his family and furnish an apartment in the East Side; his wife and children arrive in New York City. Paints "Zapatistas" for the modern Art Museum and "Villa" (Now in the Carrillo Gil Collection). Orozco meets cinema director Sergei Eisenstein. Exhibits in Boston ("Grace Hornes Galleries"); prepares a series of lithographs and drawings to be shown at the Wisconsin Union
- 1932 He makes a short--and only--trip to Europe: he visits Great Britain, France, Italy and Spain. Back in America he paints in Dartmouth College (Hanover, New Hampshire) a series of panels representing the historical development of America; he had been invited by the head of the Fine Arts Department, Mr. Packard. The panels are to depict: "The Migrations", "Human Sacrifices", "Coming of Quetzalcóatl", "The Culture of Corn", "The Return of Quetzalcóatl", "Conquest and Evangelization". "Industrialization", "English America," "Spanish America", "Science" and "Modern Sacrifice of the Unknown Soldier", the composition is closed with "Christ destroys His Cross", showing the Lord in front of a civilization collapsing surrounded by cannons. His assistant in Dartmouth is Carlos Sanchez, a Guatemalan educated in the United States. Orozco draws five illustrations for Susan Smith's novel "The Glories of Venus". Publication of Alma Reed's book on Orozco. The painter's family moves to Hanover. This year Orozco produces several works including large pictures. He interviews Eisenstein in New York City. His temperas from "Mexico in Revolution" and some lithographs are exhibited in Albertine Gallery in Vienna. That exhibition will go later to Denver. He is elected by "Vanity Fair" Magazine as The Man of the Month for the Hall of Fame. He meets again French pacifist and writer Henri Barbusse.

- 1933 Proceeds with his work in Dartmouth; he amplifies the goal of his murals filling then with devastating commentaries on American society. He paints "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier", synthesizing anti-war arguments of peace lovers. In the Austrian newspaper *Die Kunst* an article is published of Orozco frescoes written by Doctor Hans Tietze, director of the Albertine Gallery.
- 1934 Conclusion of Dartmouth College murals. He writes, on request, *Foreword to Orozco Frescoes at Dartmouth*. Exhibits are at the Civic Auditorium at la Porte, Indiana and at the Arts Club, Chicago, Illinois. In New York City, Mexican restaurant "Tovar" closes; the restaurant had been for a time a meeting place for the artist and his friends. He comes back to Mexico and paints, commissioned by Antonio Castro Leal, director of the Department of Fine Arts, the mural "Catharsis", located on the third floor of the Palace of Fine Arts. This painting is a violent criticism of contemporary society. Orozco meets Luis Cardoza y Arag6n, art critic. 1935 As a delegate of the Writers and Artists League (LEAR) he goes with Rufino Tamayo to the Congress of American Artists in New York City. His mother Rosa Flores Navarro Viuda de Orozco dies. Publishes a series of lithographs: "Mexican Rocks", "The Pile of Debris", "Dead Woman", "Fragments" (Female heads from Catharsis) "Hats" and the engravings Note I and II". In Jalisco the Governor is Evarardo Topete who intensifies land reform, supports the workers and finances strikes. Carlos Chavez composes his "Indian Symphony" and "Republican Overture"; in them he incorporates indian rhythms and melodies. Guillermo Ruiz builds the monument to Morelos in Janitzio island. Fernando Beltrán Puga and Federico Mariscal design the building of the Department of Federal District, twin to the old City Hall. Diego Rivera builds the Anahuacalli shaped like a pyramid and art laboratory dependent from the National University is opened.
- 1936 Orozco goes to live in Guadalajara invited by the Governor of Jalisco Everardo Topete. He paints "The People and the False Leaders" -and "Culture" (also known as the Five Phase of Man") on the walls and dome of the University's main Auditorium. The New Delphic Studios exhibits a complete collection of Orozco's lithographs: "A Requiem", "Rear Guard", "Soldier's Widow", "Franciscan Friar", "Mexican Village", "Three Generations", "Little Indians", Mural detail", "Revolution" "Maguey", "Marching Women", "Mexican Landscape", "Hand", Unemployed", "Lovers", "Vaudeville", "Tourists and Pulqueria", later: "The American Stage" was added.
- 1937 He starts the decoration of the walls, and vault of the staircase of the Palacio de Gobierno (State Capitol) at Guadalajara, Jalisco. He paints there "Exploitation of the Masses", "Rebellion of the Exploited", and "Fall of the Exploiters". He places Hidalgo as a heroic fighter against political miseries. He finishes the decoration of the main auditorium of the University of Guadalajara.
- 1938 He starts the murals of the Hospicio Cabañas, also in Guadalajara with the subject "The Spanish Conquest in Mexico" (The Hospicio Cabañas was the State Orphanage).
- 1939 Conclusion of the Hospicio's murals including the dome where he painted the monumental "Man of Fire," considered by many as his master work.

- 1940 The Gallery of Mexican Art in Mexico City exhibits sketches and studies for his mural paintings. He agrees, on request from architect Mario Pani to design a crucifix for the Church of Christ the King in Mexico City. He finishes the drawings but the next stage which was to build the metal model was never finished. He paints in Jiquilpan, Michoacan the murals for the "Gabino Ortiz Library". He goes back to the United States, paints the portable panel "Dive Bomber" for the MOMA. The Museum publishes the leaflet "Orozco Explains" where the artist writes on the absurdity of trying to explain painting which he defines as "A poem and nothing else". This text is illustrated with photographs in which he appears working in different stages of fresco painting. He returns to Mexico, finishes the paintings at Jiquilpan and starts the murals for the Supreme Court of Justice in Mexico City.
- 1941 He finishes the murals at the Supreme Court. In them he deals with Justice, The Proletarian Struggle and National Resources.
- 1942 He starts the mural for the Church of the Hospital de Jesus Nazareno in Mexico City, then murals are based on the Apocalypse. He publishes his autobiography in a Mexico City newspaper, "Excelsior".
- 1943 He is appointed member of the Colegio Nacional. He exhibits for the first time in this institution with paintings about death including the outstanding canvas "Death and Resurrection".
- 1944 He paints "The Victory" (Carrillo Gil collection) a denunciation against war while the struggle goes on against Nazi Germany. Second exhibition at El Colegio Nacional. He speaks on the seventh anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Paints a portrait of Mexico's Archbishop, Dr. Luis Maria Martinez. He paints the vaults of the choir in the former chapel of the Hospital de Jesús Nazareno.
- 1945 He paints the portable murals for the dining hall at the Turf Club in Mexico City. Third exhibition at El Colegio Nacional. He returns to New York City.
- 1946 In New York City he paints his last self-portrait (Carrillo Gil Collection). He comes back to Mexico City. Fourth exhibition at El Colegio Nacional. He is awarded the national prize of Art and Science.
- 1947 He participates in the National Exhibition that takes place at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City and writes his "Notes about Mural Paintings Techniques in Mexico during the last twenty-five years", material included in the book "José Clemente Orozco". Fifth exhibition at El Colegio Nacional: he shows the series "Los Te6lcs" ("The Conquerors"). At the end of the year he starts the mural at the open air Auditorium of the National Teacher's School; he also decorates the hall of the building.
- 1948 At the UNESCO meeting in Mexico, Orozco broadcasts an. Important message: "Mexico and its Painting"; at the time he was painting the parabolic wall (380 square meters) at the Teacher's School: "this mural painting is the first made in Mexico on a concrete wall in the open air and with materials which are weather resistant such as ethyl-silicate glass incrustation and stainless metals". He makes arrangements to finish his murals at the Hospital de Jesús Nazareno and to protect them. He paints "Revived Juarez", portable panel in the National Museum of History. Sixth exhibition at El Colegio Nacional. Starts the decoration in Jalisco's Chamber of Deputies. During these last years of his life he shows a

great interest on portraits and accomplishes remarkable paintings using oil and synthetic materials; the portraits of Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Justino Fernandez, Enrique Corcuera, Santiago Reachi, Annette Stevens, Dolores del Rio, Carmen Alvar de Carrillo Gil, and the painter's daughter Lucrecia are outstanding.

- 1949 Finishes his mural in Jalisco Chamber of Deputies called "The Great Mexican Revolutionary Legislation". He is very busy with the plans to finish the frescoes at the Hospital de Jesús where he wants to create an abstract decoration as a color equivalent of musical harmonies; he is also working on a project for the decoration of a dome at the monument to the Revolution and a new mural, called "Springtime" for the garden of the housing-complex President Alemán. He dies on September 7th. *The New York Times* publishes his obituary on the 8th. A solemn wake takes place at the Palace of Fine Arts. The Mexican Congress decrees two days of mourning; his remains are to rest in the Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres (A cemetery for great Mexicans). In December, El Colegio Nacional offers Orozco a posthumous homage.

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