

68 MEXICAN MURALS e) Jose Clemente Orozco

Frescoes by Jose Clemente Orozco

Jose Clemente Orozco selects for his subject matter both the revolutionary period in Mexico and the contemporary one. Unlike Diego Rivera, who is said to have painted the revolution as it should have been, Orozco paints that period as it actually was. His documentation is the result of first hand experience in the revolution. His Mexican subjects are never folkloric but always those which he himself has seen. His main concern however is less with the appearance of his time than with the feeling of his time. His early work was motivated by a mockery and an anger at existing social falsehood. Later, it seems to be added a feeling of despair -- crystallized perhaps in his painting of Christ jumping from his own cross (at Dartmouth College), and in his fresco in the Supreme Court of Mexico where he represents the mob open-mouthed, following an armed gorilla, (brute force instead of reason).

In the beginning his technique, like Rivera's, was in the Renaissance tradition. Color was limited and transparent, brush strokes fine and close together, and surfaces smooth. Later he became more interested in the Byzantine technique of fresco. His colors are opaque instead of transparent, lime white is used freely and sometimes mixed with color. The wall is not plastered first and then painted. Instead, he plasters as he paints, actually mixing his colors with the wet plaster for his background areas and then organizes his composition by means of bold black lines. His early work reflects the influences of his European trip in 1922, and the mural at Dartmouth (1932) marks the turning point in his style. Orozco does not attempt to incorporate his murals with the architectural scheme -- and frequently creates an illusion of three dimensions in his frescoes.

- 68A The idea of this mural is omniscience. The composition is symmetrical and the use of the human figure is symbolic. The center panel shows a kneeling figure with a female on one side and the male on the other. The male holds a large sword. Note that in this fresco the technique is not unlike that of Diego Rivera -- the surface is smooth, the brush strokes small and close together. Fire is used here for the first time by Orozco as a symbol of the "conscience of man".

National Preparatory School

These murals were begun in 1922 and cover the walls of three floors around the patio of this colonial building. Subject matter of the first floor represents social sacrifice for ideals; the panels on the second floor are a criticism of social falsehood; and the third floor, which is the most poetic, represents the ideals of the peasants.

- 68B This early fresco painting is called "The Barricade". Note the insistence upon white as a color in itself and the use of it for modeling. Notice the dynamic composition resulting from the organization on diagonals. Finally, note the space-filling composition and the balance resulting from the placement of figures.
- 68C Detail from "The Barricade". Though this painting has a tremendous force and realistic quality, the drawing is anything but realistic. We already see in this fresco the beginning of a very personal style which develops in Orozco's later work. Distortion is used for the sake of emphasis and design.
- 68D Another of the early Orozco frescoes using the fine brush stroke and transparent color of the renaissance tradition. In contrast to the work of Diego Rivera, note that no attempt is made here to unite the painting with the architecture.

- 68E In this panel of the armed soldier blinded by the red flag and the worker helpless without arms, Orozco is painting an interpretation of universal sacrifice and tragedy.
- 68F Here Orozco uses a mural to shout against the mockery of the present social system. The color is vibrant and intentionally not harmonious because he is protesting. The color here is definitely related to the Artist's idea and is used symbolically.
- 68G Note the free loose composition, the large spontaneous brush strokes, in sharp contrast to the technique used in the earlier period of Orozco's work.
- 68H It is important to note in the work of Jose Clemente Orozco, the consistent use of fire as a symbol for the conscience or soul of man. It frequently implies punishment since man must pay for his intellectual awakening. In the center of this panel is a large portrait of Father Hidalgo -- a symbol of liberty inflaming the masses with "fire" which is behind them. This mural depicts a world of revolution, massacre, degradation and mockery. Color is used symbolically. The "masses" are painted a light neutral gray of no special character.
- 68I Portrait of Father Hidalgo.
- 68J Detail of the portrait of Father Hidalgo.

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The Orphanage, Guadalajara (

This building constructed at the end of the 18th century was designed by Tolsa and is of

magnificent architectural proportions. The mural represents Orozco's idea of the various aspects of man. He concentrates on the figure enclosed in flame (a symbol of man tortured by a living conscience), placed as if suspended in the dome which is the center of the composition. The entire composition is worked literally in the opposition of ideas and forces.

- 69A The orphanage in Guadalajara. View of the main dome and the ceiling of the corridor. The technique of the painting is direct, dynamic, and very free. A few brush strokes express a complete idea. The "electricity" of white strokes suggest rather than represent anatomy. Orozco uses a pattern of light to express a surface rather than a three dimensional concept.
- 69B The small panels supporting the dome represent arts and crafts indicating that man has tried to achieve a creative expression.
- 69C View of one of the sections of the ceiling.
- 69D The painting in the dome is symbolic of the complexities and many aspects of man.
- 69E Note the restrained use of limited color, the highly personal and special use of white, and the nervous intense quality of the brush strokes in this painting.
- 69F This panel represents the role of religion in the life of man. Note again the limited use of color, and the large brush strokes. No attempt is made by Orozco to completely fill the space or to unite his painting with the architecture of the building.
- 69G This mural represents militarized and mechanized masses enclosed in what seems like the barbed wire of a concentration camp. Here Orozco uses the device of projecting a literary idea against a back-

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ground of masses of people. In these paintings one senses the very passionate quality of the artist.

- 69H The Supreme Court, Mexico. One of the more recent of Orozco's murals, these paintings and allegories of justice represent Orozco's idea of the social movement of the workers in Mexico. In the center of this long panel is a figure (the jaguar) representing Mexico, resting upon the Mexican flag. Underneath this flag are the symbols of gold, silver, copper, etc., -- the wealth of Mexico. In the center is a huge monster's head symbolizing oil. Note on the extreme right that gold is represented as a skeleton, something dead, and within the dead skeleton is a dragon. Silver is painted as capricious and light. The jaguar is guarding the national wealth which is here conceived as the material wealth of the earth, inanimate and dead.
- 69I Detail of the center of the panel showing the symbol of oil and the flag, part of the jaguar's head and claws. Note the direct spontaneous brush strokes, the vibrant quality of the color.
- 69J Allegory of Justice. This panel painted in limited colors of black, white, orange, and red, represents justice as degenerate and corrupt. Lawyers are manipulating the scales, and justice asleep has lost the scales to the mob. Lightning or flame from above is piercing the mob who try to escape it. Some of the dishonest records and law books are shown consumed by flames. Orozco is once again saying that only justice from above is honest and that law and man-made justice, without conscience, is merely trickery.