

153 and 154

JOAQUIN TORRES GARCIA

Joaquin Torres Garcia, the pioneer of Constructivism in the Americas was born in 1874 and died August 8, 1949.

Torres Garcia held to his aesthetic ideas with the firmness of religious belief. Reacting to the Western Hemisphere tendency toward the restlessly flamboyant, he advocated a return to order and stability. In seeking to reveal inner structure, he turned objects into symbols, adopting the flat, two-dimensional technique employed by children or by primitive man. In so doing, however, he was guided by reason, rather than by instinct.

The problem for him was to impart to the asymmetrical an air of balance. He went about his task with the zeal of a standard-bearer engaged in combat. He held forth on his views both in speech and in print, lecturing and writing essays. The bibliography of his published books and pamphlets is considerable.

Torres lived to be seventy-five. He was born in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, at the mouth of the broad river La Plata. One of the busiest ports in South America, it was then strongly influenced by European culture. Torres' father, a cabinet maker by trade, came from Catalonia; his mother was Uruguayan.

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The group continued to follow the Neo-Plasticist line taken by its founders. For example, it asserted that a picture is no more than a flat surface on which the predominant element should be the straight line; secondly, that balance results from proportion, and thirdly, that composition should be based on asymmetry.

Torres enriched his artistic ideology with symbols of his own devising. A key represents reason. A triangle stands for the mind. A fish stands for the body, or for brute matter. A heart represents the soul. It is curious to note that Torres' clocks, their hands forming a right angle, always show the same time of day. His masks look less European than pre-Hispanic American. Scales, the sun, and staircases are also constantly recurring images.

Torres had matured in Paris and needed something different to satisfy his creative urge. He found it in a rediscovery of America, of the unforgotten land where he was born.

In 1934, forty-three years after Torres' departure for Europe, Montevideo continued calm and orderly, suspended in time, provincial

in its ideas. In painting, Uruguay had produced artists such as Figari and Barradas, but both had emigrated, seeking better opportunities elsewhere. When Torres proceeded to air his avant-garde ideas, the local critics and artists proclaimed open warfare on Constructivism.

Softening his severely internationalist approach to thematic material, Torres permitted himself a few allusions to native subjects. Among his hieroglyphs we begin to find such symbolic elements as the pediments of neoclassical facades, the Uruguayan flag, locomotives, and oxcarts.

His first exhibit aroused indignant criticism. Torres replied by giving lectures, declaring on one occasion:

" I have said many times that - so far as I know - I am the first to have drawn a line between painting and monumental constructive art. I have also said that painting derives from what is personal and individual, whereas constructive art derives from what is universal. "

A few young artists turned to him for guidance, leading him to open a workshop. He did not cease to paint with feverish intensity. And all the while he was publishing books. Obsessed by the urge to create, he made every minute count.

Torres Garcia was a tireless worker. In the period 1941 to 1943 he brought out two important books. One was "The City without a Name", issued as the facsimile of an illustrated manuscript, in which the author's aesthetic ideas are set forth in the form of a novel.

The other book, "Universal Constructivism", sums up his writing in the field of art. It is by all means his longest and most highly developed literary effort.

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154 URUGUAY: ART OF TORRES GARCIA II

- 154 A) "Portraits of My Children" - 1919
- 154 B) "Portrait of Manolita", his wife. The painter is influenced by Puvis de Chavannes, the french master.
- 154 C) "Adam and Eve". The figures show already the constructivist manner in the construction of the bodies.
- 154 D) "Portrait of Velasquez", 1945. An interpretation of the self-portrait by the Spanish master.
- 154 E) Constructivist Composition with the name "America", 1943.
- 154 F) Constructivist Composition inspired by the Ancient Wall of the Incas, 1942.
- 154 G) Another composition with symbols where the clock and the sun predominate ~~1954~~ 1945.
- 154 H) Detail of the Big Wall, "Cosmic Monument", in Montevideo. The design is engraved on the pink granite.
- 154 I) Composition in white and black giving the appearance of relief.
- 154 J) The tomb of the artist. A monument in grey granite made by his sons Augusto y Horacio after the constructivist style of their father.



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AUDIO-VISUAL PROGRAM

Sets 153, 154 URUGUAY THE ART OF TORRES GARCIA

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museum of modern art of latin america



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153 URUGUAY: ART OF TORRES GARCIA I

- 153 A) Early work in Barcelona - 1906, intended project for a mural inspired by Puvis de Chavannes.
- 153 B) "Meeting at The Academy", figures in the foreground are almost sketched. A reminder of Goya in the Black Epoch.
- 153 C) Street in Barcelona - 1918.
- 153 D) Portrait of Bach - 1940.
- 153 E) One of the seven murals made with the assistance of his students for the Colonia Saint Bois.
- 153 F) A Painting with similar style of the Mural made in 1946.
- 153 G) Constructivist composition - 1931
- 153 H) Another Constructivist composition - 1928.
- 153 I) Constructivist composition using the name "Manolita", wife of the painter.
- 153 J) Constructivist painting using symbols like the house, the ship, a fish, etc..

