

A Spiritual Manifestation of Mexican Muralism

Works by Jean Charlot and Alfredo Ramos Martínez

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THESIS

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I dedicate this project to my parents, Rosemary and Cas Galpin.

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SUMMARY

Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Jean Charlot were central figures in the development of Mexican modernism, but by 1930, both artists relocated to the United States, with Charlot living in New York and Ramos Martínez in Los Angeles. In the United States, Charlot and Ramos Martínez produced major bodies of works that presented indigenous cultures of Mexico, emphasized their Catholic faith, and affirmed their dedication to Mexican muralism. Through their extensive work, they distinguished themselves from many major muralists by embracing Catholicism. Charlot lived primarily in Hawai‘i after 1949, but traveled to the continental United States frequently, while Ramos Martínez lived in Los Angeles.

This dissertation offers both descriptive and critical analysis of these artists’ works made in Mexico and the United States, with specific attention to the murals and religious-inspired works realized in the United States. Both artists are understudied, and many of their works referenced in this project have rarely, if ever, been addressed by scholars. While a number of secondary sources were consulted, a variety of primary materials such as letters, photographs, and pamphlets, were accessed at a number of archives. A few interviews with people who knew the artists or who had conducted research on the topic proved helpful. Viewing many murals in their original locations at universities, churches, and other public buildings contributed to this analysis, as did the study of small-scale works housed in archives, museums, galleries, and private collections.

**A Spiritual Manifestation of Mexican Muralism in the United States:
Works by Jean Charlot and Alfredo Ramos Martínez**

I. INTRODUCTION

Mexican muralism was an essential contribution to the development of twentieth-century American art, and artists Jean Charlot (1898–1979) and Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946) both participated in the Mexican mural movement and actively shaped the spread of muralism in the United States.¹ Charlot and Ramos Martínez are fairly well-known figures in the history of modernism in Mexico, but their full involvement in twentieth-century art and the breadth of their work remain under-recognized. Each of these artists contributed both formally and informally to the education of Americans about the mural movement. Furthermore, Charlot and Ramos Martínez simultaneously documented the plight of the worker while emphasizing traditional customs of the indigenous populations of Mexico. Their agendas were similar to those pursued by artists such as Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974); however, Charlot and Ramos Martínez, as immigrants to the United States, differentiated themselves from those who made Mexican muralism internationally-renowned.² Most significantly, after settling in the United States, Charlot and Ramos Martínez became increasingly devoted to Catholicism and took up painting murals in religious spaces. They retained a distinctive style they had each developed in Europe, refined in Mexico,

¹ Birth and death dates will be given for artists, writers, and other major figures when known.

² Charlot and Ramos Martínez are a part of a larger story of immigration to the United States during the twentieth century. Many artists who came to the United States during the first half of the twentieth century came as a result of war or because they were in search of new economic opportunity. Many of these artists often had a major impact on the development of American art; for example, foreign artists in New York during World War II contributed to the influence of Surrealism among American artists. In Los Angeles, many foreign artists found work in the film industry. In terms of Mexican immigration, by 1940, L.A. had the largest Mexican population outside of Mexico City.

and realized in the United States, and they separated themselves from their contemporaries through their motivation to create Catholic art, an intent that was inherently tied to their interest in social justice. While both artists are important, in this study the focus is placed on Charlot, for he left behind a larger body of work to examine and a tremendous amount of archival material from which to glean information. The work of Ramos Martínez functions as a supporting narrative to the career of Charlot by demonstrating the fact that, although Charlot was a distinctive figure, his art fits into a larger story about the impact of Mexican muralism in the United States. As a result of their exposure to Mexican art, many artists active in the United States realized works that were a product of Mexican and American influences.

Charlot and Ramos Martínez chose a remarkable moment in the history of Catholicism in both Mexico and the United States to produce religious art. Each artist left Mexico during the 1920s when there was intense debate over the increasingly antagonistic separation between the government and the powerful Catholic Church. In contrast, both artists' arrival in the United States corresponded to a burgeoning movement of social activism amongst a group of Catholics who founded the Catholic Worker movement in the 1930s. As the Great Depression began in the 1930s, Catholicism still sought to find a prominent place amidst the Protestant-dominated United States.³ After 1930, many second-generation immigrants who practiced Catholicism had established themselves economically and were now a part of the middle class.⁴ A subset of this group became activists and advocated for the Catholic Worker movement. The

³ Ronald W. Schatz, "American Labor and the Catholic Church, 1919–1950," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 3, no.3 (Fall–Winter 1983): 183.

⁴ Sheila Webb, "Dorothy Day and the Early Years of the 'Catholic Worker': Social Action through the Pages of the Press," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no.3 (Summer 2003):78.

geographic and social context where each artist created religious work proved fortuitous as both artists increased their Catholic-inspired work in the United States.

In terms of art historical context, Charlot and Ramos Martínez are typically analyzed through the lens of Mexican art, but in this project the attention rests on the work they created in the United States, how they made major contributions to American culture, and how their work can be understood in the context of both their American and Mexican counterparts. Charlot and Ramos Martínez were muralists, but the different media in which they created art (drawings, easel paintings, and prints) also reveal their commitment to the struggles of the people. Moreover, the study of small-scale works sheds light on their large-scale production and offers outstanding emblematic examples of their extensive and impressive bodies of work.

From 1921 to the present, artists have confronted new ideas, materials, styles, and personalities when considering the revolutionary murals of Mexico.⁵ Some of the artists influenced by murals were originally from Mexico, several stayed in Mexico temporarily, and others visited and then remained in the country for the rest of their lives and became Mexican citizens. Not every artist changed by his experience with the art of the Mexican muralists encountered the source of his inspiration in Mexico. For certain artists, the impact of muralism occurred largely in the United States, where each of *los tres grandes* or the big three, Rivera, Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), created murals and pursued their art careers at some point. Furthermore, other American artists were first introduced to Mexican muralism by their fellow artists living in the United

⁵ With the armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution over by 1920, the following year of 1921 marked the beginning of a major effort on the part of the government and in particular, the Ministry of Education, to redefine a national identity for Mexico through the visual arts.

States who were inspired to spread the tenets of muralism decades after their own experiences in Mexico. For example, Juliette May Fraser (1887–1983) was already a talented artist interested in portraying Social Realism in her work when she met Charlot in Honolulu.⁶ As a result of their friendship, however, Charlot taught Fraser the fresco technique, and he became a great supporter of her work. For his part, Ramos Martínez was influential to American artists such as Hugo Ballin (1879–1956), Maynard Dixon (1875–1946), Leo Katz (1924–1972), Fletcher Martin (1904–1979), and Millard Sheets (1907–1989).⁷

This dissertation examines how Charlot and Ramos Martínez disseminated Mexican muralism, developed their own distinctive murals separate from the prevailing concepts of muralism in Mexico, and contributed to the formulation of an identity for Mexico forged in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. To illuminate successfully the multifaceted diffusion of the mural-making process and the complex distillation of Mexican identity in the United States, this project focuses on the work of Charlot and Ramos Martínez because of their direct contact with the beginning of the mural movement and their continued recognition of the importance of murals throughout their careers. These two artists specifically embraced Catholicism, worked in art education, and engaged American audiences with their experiences in Mexico and their affinity for Mexican culture in distinctive ways that necessitate further investigation. Moreover, their devotion to religious art separated them from many of their American and Mexican counterparts whose work will be referenced in this project. This dissertation

⁶ In relation to the visual arts, Social Realism involves the realist depictions of subject matter to convey political or social commentary.

⁷ Margarita Nieto, “The Game of Circumstance,” in *Alfredo Ramos Martínez* (Beverly Hills, CA: Louis Stern Galleries, 1992), 18.

demonstrates why Charlot and Ramos Martínez are worthy of more research and study. My analysis uncovers their underappreciated works and recognizes their artistic production as major contributions to both Mexican and American cultures.

Charlot and Ramos Martínez offer important case studies for their continued dedication to the Mexican mural movement (after 1940, murals became increasingly less fashionable), the diverse spaces in which they completed murals, and the disparate institutions in the United States that they used as vehicles for their artistic messages. With only Charlot spending considerable time in New York City, the focus of this project moves away from the notion of New York as the site for any major artistic development in the United States and investigates how Charlot was effective throughout the US (including Hawai‘i) and how Ramos Martínez made an important contribution to modern art in California. Furthermore, because New York has been such a force in the narrative of modernism in the United States, artists working in other regions have been neglected. This study presents new narratives for modern art by focusing on Charlot, who lived in Hawai‘i from 1949 to 1979, and Ramos Martínez, who lived in California from 1929 to 1946.

Although the art produced by the Mexican muralists has shaped the careers of many artists in the United States, this influence is in general not studied to the extent of its widespread impact. For example, while the Mural Division of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), founded in 1935, and the murals it produced are frequently identified as being related to the Mexican mural movement, there are many artists who, in more nuanced ways (and in small-scale forms), spread Mexican

muralism via their work and their teaching in the United States.⁸ By exploring the trajectory of the careers of Charlot and Ramos Martínez and examining the work they produced as a result of their relationship with murals, distinctive and complex interpretations of Mexican muralism are revealed. Moreover, while the overtly political content of the Mexican muralists appears largely absent from the work of these two artists, each artist embraces an image of Mexico as a romantic place untouched by time, a notion also considered by the Mexican muralists, whether intentionally or not.

The way in which these artists created work and the type of subject matter they emphasized are integral to understanding their art. In terms of media, murals, easel paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures will be incorporated into my project. It is precisely through the analysis of varied media that many iconographic similarities are revealed. In regard to specific types of iconography, figural forms reverberate throughout the study as various artists focused on the human experience. Certain works present highly regarded individuals, while others feature the soldier, the worker, and the market vendor. The muralists idolized the worker, and in solidarity with the worker they often made similar wages. The murals by Mexican painters and their American contemporaries consistently reinforce a connection to human experience. This attention to the human condition manifests itself in two ways: through subject matter that elicits emotion and through the relationship between the built environment, the mural, and the viewer.

⁸ After spending time in Mexico, American painter George Biddle (1885–1973) encouraged his old friend, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), to establish a government-sponsored mural movement in the United States.

A. Literature Review and Research

Diverse avenues of investigation were explored to amass the necessary materials for this study. Research at the Jean Charlot Collection, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, La Jolla Historical Society, Coronado Historical Society, Santa Barbara Historical Museum, Scripps College Museum, Arizona State Museum, and The San Diego Museum of Art Library yielded important documents and historical photographs of, and related to, Charlot and Ramos Martínez. Visits to murals by the artists in divergent places in Mexico, for example, Ensenada and Mexico City, and in the United States in Arizona, California, Hawai‘i, Indiana, and New York, among other locations, offered dynamic opportunities to study the visual content of the works and to learn about their relationship to local communities. Interviews with American artists Mark Rogovin and Philip Stein (also known as Estaño, a nickname given to him by Siqueiros), both of whom worked as mural assistants in Mexico, as well as many conversations with John Charlot (son of Jean Charlot), Julie Pinney (niece of Jean Charlot), David Charlot (grandson of Jean Charlot), Lucienne Allen (granddaughter of Lucienne Bloch and Stephen Pope Dimitroff, who worked as assistants to Diego Rivera in the United States), and Brigita Anguiano (widow of the second-generation Mexican muralist Raúl Anguiano) have informed my work. Visits with art collectors and dealers Louis Stern, Bryce Bannatyne, and Pierrette Van Cleve allowed me to see a number of works by Ramos Martínez and to learn more about the conservation of his murals. Lastly, several conversations with Chicano painter Judithe Hernández were helpful to understanding the current work of muralists and the lasting impact of the Mexican muralists.

To begin with, a number of important accounts of the Mexican mural movement written by authors who had direct experience with the muralists were consulted. Charlot's own *Mexican Mural Renaissance* provided an insider's viewpoint to the history of murals in Mexico.⁹ While the opening chapters address pre-Columbian and colonial influences, the bulk of the book focuses on the modern movement and helps to illuminate the experience of living in Mexico City during the 1920s.¹⁰ Artist Ione Robinson's *A Wall to Paint On* presents mostly letters Robinson wrote to her mother while in Mexico City.¹¹ Robinson knew Rivera well and painted alongside Victor Arnautoff (1896–1979) as an assistant on Rivera's National Palace murals. Robinson's book offers a sense of the leftist politics active in Mexico through her relationship with Joseph Freeman (1897–1965), a writer and activist whose papers are located in the archives of Stanford University.¹² Emily Edwards's book, *Painted Walls of Mexico from Prehistoric Times until Today* offers an important survey of the Mexican mural movement from pre-Columbian work to the murals by Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros. As Charlot notes in the opening pages of the book, Edwards offers a unique perspective in her analysis of the mural movement because instead of being a well-intentioned graduate student, she was an artist who experienced the murals in Mexico and met many of the major artists in the process of developing her work.¹³ She enlisted the help of noted Mexican photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo (1902–2002) to document some of the murals. Edwards was a Director of

⁹ Jean Charlot, *Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

¹⁰ Charlot completed his study of the Mexican murals as a result of a Guggenheim Fellowship.

¹¹ Robinson was critical of Zohmah Day Charlot (Jean Charlot's wife). Ione and Zohmah were briefly roommates in Mexico City. Zohmah later wrote her memoir about her time in Mexico. Zohmah Charlot, *Mexican Memories, 1931*, ed. Ronn Reck. Privately published in Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1989.

¹² Ione Robinson, *A Wall to Paint On* (New York: E.P. Dutton), 1946.

¹³ Jean Charlot, foreword to *Painted Walls of Mexico from Prehistoric Times until Today*, by Emily Edwards (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), ix.

the Art School at the Hull-House in Chicago, where she encouraged many artists to travel to Mexico and take part in the mural movement.

Thus far, art historian James Oles has developed the most significant contributions to the scholarship on the influence of American artists and Mexican art. Through his landmark exhibition and accompanying publication, *South of the Border, Mexico in the American Imagination, 1917-1947*, Oles encourages both the scholarly community and the public to think about the relationship between Mexico and the United States and addresses artists whose connections to Mexico were previously unknown. This book offers a historical examination of the topic and includes a variety of styles of art created in diverse media. Furthermore, it provides background information on the motivations for artists to leave the United States for Mexico, such as the American Prohibition laws, the economic depression, the rise of fascism, and specifically, the Good Neighbor Policy.¹⁴ During 1933, the Good Neighbor Policy was legislation enacted by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) in which the US government declared its intention to have improved relationships with Latin America, with the specific goal of mutually beneficial trade agreements and a promise to refrain from interfering with the affairs of Latin American governments. This policy was promoted throughout Roosevelt’s administration, which lasted from 1933 to 1945, but as the Cold War ensued from 1946 to 1961, the Good Neighbor Policy was left behind.

Other publications by Oles have contributed further to the US/Mexico dialogue about art, most notably *Las hermanas Greenwood*, an edited version of his larger, more comprehensive study found in his doctoral dissertation, *Walls to Paint On: American*

¹⁴ James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1917-1967* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 3-5.

Muralists in Mexico, 1933-1936.¹⁵ An essay by Oles on Isamu Noguchi highlights the artist's under-recognized work in Mexico City and offers a comprehensive overview of American artists in Mexico, specifically addressing the murals produced at the Abelardo Rodríguez market in Mexico City.¹⁶ The art of Pablo O'Higgins (1904–1983), an artist included in many of Oles's studies, plays an important part in the study of American artists and the influence of Mexican muralism.¹⁷ O'Higgins was the focus of a recent book entitled *Becoming Pablo O'Higgins* by Susan Vogel which examines his life and work and brings a detailed account of the artist to the attention of English-speaking readers for the first time.¹⁸

As exemplified by Oles's seminal project, which was a museum-sponsored initiative, museums have directed the recent scholarship in terms of studying cross-cultural relationships in the arts between Latin America and the United States. The Bronx Museum of Art led the way with its groundbreaking exhibition and accompanying book *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*, which spanned fifty years of Latin American art and included references to the Mexican muralists and the more abstract artists from South America who found a home in New York City.¹⁹ More recently the Newark Museum of Art assembled *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America 1920s-50s* (2010). While this project looked at

¹⁵ —, "Walls to Paint On: American Muralists in Mexico, 1933–1936" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1995); *Las hermanas Greenwood en México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000); "The Mexican Murals of Marion and Grace Greenwood," in *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 113-134.

¹⁶ —, "Noguchi in Mexico: International Themes for a Working-Class Market," *American Art* 15, no.2. (Summer 2001): 10-33.

¹⁷ Born Paul O'Higgins in Utah, he changed his name to Pablo after moving to Mexico.

¹⁸ Susan Vogel, *Becoming Pablo O'Higgins* (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2010).

¹⁹ *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1988).

geometric abstraction and focused on the artistic movements in South American countries such as Uruguay, it was a momentous exhibition that demonstrated how American art has been shaped, at least in part, by developments in Latin American art. Moreover, *Constructive Spirit* emphasized how the artists who crossed international borders established themselves as artists of significance in foreign cities. Though small, the Museo del Barrio in New York continues to create noteworthy exhibitions that incite new ways of thinking and viewing. Two recent exhibitions, *Nueva York 1613–1945* (2010) and *Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis* (2009) have shed light on the international influences, specifically Latin American, in the arts created in New York City. While *Nueva York* included works that demonstrate the Spanish influence on New York, the emphasis was placed on the myriad of Latin American cultures that have impacted cultural developments in the city. While all of the museum projects mentioned previously were important, they were survey initiatives that did not have the luxury of examining closely the multifaceted contributions of Charlot and Ramos Martínez.

In addition to the global inquiries already addressed, a number of recent projects have looked closely at the exchange across the US/Mexico border and simultaneously focused on specific artists. Although *Translating Revolution: U.S. Artists Interpret Mexican Muralism* at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, Illinois (2010) did not have a catalogue, the exhibition brought together paintings, many for the first time, by both Mexican muralists and their American counterparts to reveal the influence of Mexican muralism in the United States. As curator of the exhibition, I assembled a diverse body of work to tell the story broadly, but there was also a concerted effort to

highlight works by Chicago artists who are often left out of the discussion of the impact of Mexican muralism on American artists such as Morris Topchevsky, Alex Topp, Edward Millman, Mitchell Siporin, and Charles White. More recently, *Siqueiros: Censorship Defied* (2011) at the Gene Autry Center in Los Angeles offered revelatory information not only about Siqueiros's time in Los Angeles, but also his influence on young artists such as Philip Goldstein (1913–1980) and Reuben Kadish (1913–1992). Although a catalogue was not produced, the Autry Center devoted an issue of their quarterly magazine to the exhibition.²⁰ The use of primary material from the Getty Research Institute and the involvement of Luis C. Garza, an artist who knew Siqueiros well, made the exhibition especially important.

Much has been written in recent years about the experiences of the Mexican muralists in the United States. There was considerable attention focused on the work of Orozco, both *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927-1934* edited by Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes, and *Orozco in Gringoland: The Years in New York* by Alejandro Anreus offer helpful information about the muralist's time in the United States.²¹ *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927-1934* accompanied an exhibition originated at the Hood Museum in Hanover, New Hampshire. However, it provides a much more comprehensive study of the effects of the Mexican muralists on American art, as it goes beyond the influence of Orozco to look at several facets of cultural exchange, including more contemporary influences. Of particular interest to my own work are the essay by Alicia Azuela that examines the impact of Mexican artists in

²⁰ *Convergence: Autry National Center Magazine*, fall 2010.

²¹ *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927–1934*, ed. Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002); Alejandro Anreus, *Orozco in Gringoland: The Years in New York* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

the United States and the essay by Victor Sorrell that explores the varied influences of Mexican muralism on American painters.²² Both essays advance understanding of the cross-cultural mural exchange, but neither discusses Charlot or Ramos Martínez in a substantive way.

Another scholar, Anna Indych-López, has recently made important contributions to this field through her essays, books, and contributions to exhibition catalogues. Indych-López's *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* addresses all three well-known muralists and asserts that when the portable frescoes became fashionable commissions for the Mexican muralists in the United States, their work changed not only in purpose, but also in meaning.²³ The author's book stems from her dissertation and a subsequent article in *Art Bulletin* entitled, "Mural Gambits: Mexican Muralism in the United States and the 'Portable' Fresco." In this essay, Indych-López writes, "During the 1930s, audiences in the United States experience muralism indirectly, through a variety of media. One such medium, the portable fresco, as executed specifically for the United States by Rivera at the beginning of the decade, was a critical failure."²⁴ Following Indych-López's interpretation, the portable fresco functions quite differently from a mural created on the public walls of Mexico City. Indych-López continues, "The history of the portable fresco by Rivera and

²² Alicia Azuela, "The Making and Reception of the Imaginary of Artistic and Revolutionary Mexico," in *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927-1934*, ed. Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 206-15; Victor Alejandro Sorrell, "Orozco and American Muralism: Re/viewing and Enduring Artistic Legacy," in *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927-1934*, ed. Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 260-83.

²³ Anna Indych-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press), 2009.

²⁴ —, "Mural Gambits: Mexican Muralism in the United States and the 'Portable' Fresco," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (2007): 302.

Orozco questions traditionally accepted assumptions about the hegemony of cultural institutions in the United States and their ability to use Mexican culture to serve ideological and political interests.”²⁵ Removed from the public walls of Mexico, the murals, according to Indyk-López, became far from revolutionary. Charlot and Ramos Martínez also produced works that were indirect representations of Mexican muralism, but as my work claims, they were not critical failures. Indyk-López contributed a short essay, “Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Indians, Hollywood, and the Los Angeles Times,” to the Museum of Latin American Art exhibition catalogue *MEX/L.A.: Mexican Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930-1985*.²⁶ This essay on Ramos Martínez’s work raises some of the ideas about Ramos Martínez’s popularity in Hollywood that are also discussed in Chapter IV of this dissertation, and supports the idea that during the 1930s in Los Angeles, Mexican culture was particularly popular among a group of prominent Anglo Americans.

Foreign interest in Mexico has garnered attention from various scholars, and specifically, the work of the many photographers who traveled to Mexico has inspired several monographs. While there are many studies that address the individual work of artists such as Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, and Mariana Yampolsky, *Mexico Through Foreign Eyes/Vistos por Ojos Extranjeros 1850-1990* presents the collective interest of a number of artists in the culture of Mexico.²⁷ My 2001 Master’s thesis *Extranjera: Foreign Women Artists and their Encounter with Mexico* addressed similar ideas in that it

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶ Anna Indyk-López, “Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Indians, Hollywood, and the Los Angeles Times,” in *MEX/L.A.: Mexican Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930–1985* (Long Beach: Museum of Latin American Art, 2011).

²⁷ Carole Naggat and Fred Ritchin, *Mexico through Foreign Eyes: Photographs, 1850–1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).

sought to look at the expansive ways in which Mexico has served as a source of inspiration for artists from both the United States and Europe, with particular attention to geography, indigenous culture, and communities of artists.²⁸ Charlot and Ramos Martínez were foreigners adapting to new surroundings in their moves to the United States. Moreover, before arriving in the United States, Charlot emigrated from France to Mexico, and after some seventeen years in Europe, Ramos Martínez returned to his birth country of Mexico and embraced traditional Mexican culture in a way he had never before, in fact, in a way that is analogous to a foreigner's experience with Mexico.

A considerable amount of the scholarship written about Charlot comes from his son, John Charlot, a Professor of Religion at the University of Hawai'i. John Charlot continues to investigate a variety of aspects of Charlot's art and is currently working on the second volume of a planned three-volume biography of his father.²⁹ Certainly the aspect of Charlot's career that is most emphasized remains his time in Mexico and the long-lasting impact the place and its people had on his work. *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* was an exhibition and catalogue that surveyed the diverse impact of Mexican culture on the artist.³⁰ The catalogue includes a number of short essays that divide Charlot's work into helpful sections that examine topics such as the influence of the ancient manuscript collection developed by his great uncle and Charlot's archeological

²⁸ Amy Galpin, "Extranjera: Foreign Women Artists and their Encounter with Mexico" (master's thesis, San Diego State University, 2001).

²⁹ John Charlot has completed the first volume, which is nearly 1,000 pages. He describes it as part academic biography and part memoir. Other works by John Charlot about his father include: "Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture," *The Journal of Pacific History* 41, no.1 (June 2006): 61–80; "La formulación del artista: El período francés de Jean Charlot," *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994), 22–35; "A Note on Jean Charlot's View of Diego Rivera," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 60, no. 1 (1997): 115–118; "The Source of Picasso's 'First Steps': Jean Charlot's 'First Steps'," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 55, no. 2 (1992): 275–278.

³⁰ *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994).

work.³¹ Two small exhibition catalogues published in the United States, one by the University of Georgia and the other by the University of Hawai‘i, include informative essays about the artist’s life and work.³² In terms of his Georgia murals, a book co-authored by Charlot and Lamar Dodd was published in 1945 and features excellent documentation of his time in Athens via an essay about the murals by Charlot, as well as historical photographs, preparatory drawings, and personal anecdotes from individuals who were present when Charlot was living in the town.³³ An essential source for understanding Charlot’s work is Peter Morse’s thorough catalogue raisonné on his prints.³⁴ The text gives pertinent information on the prints but also provides extensive context for the work, as Morse was diligent in translating Charlot’s shorthand from his diary and applying the artist’s hastily written text to specific works of art.

Currently, a few scholars are presenting new perspectives on Charlot. In the fall of 2011, a book by Lew Andrews was published on the dynamic relationship between Charlot and Weston, a friendship that began in Mexico.³⁵ While the book is a shared study of Charlot and Weston and reveals the impact that Charlot’s wife Zohmah had on solidifying the artists’ friendship, it remains the first published book-length study to focus on Charlot. Breanne Robertson, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Maryland, is working on a dissertation that examines pre-Columbian references in WPA-sponsored

³¹ José Luis Martínez H., “Jean Charlot y la colección Boturini-Aubin-Goupil,” in *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994), 38–43; Donald McVicker, “El pintor convertido en arqueólogo: Jean Charlot en Chichén Itzá,” in *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994), 58–72.

³² Jean Charlot and Ethel Moore, *Jean Charlot: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art and the University of Georgia, 1977); *Jean Charlot: A Retrospective* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery, 1990).

³³ Jean Charlot and Lamar Dodd. *Charlot Murals in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1945).

³⁴ Peter Morse, *Jean Charlot’s Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1976).

³⁵ Lew Andrews, *Weston and Charlot: Art and Friendship* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

murals, and Charlot is one of the artists whom she plans to discuss.³⁶ My own exhibition, *Global Journey/Local Response: Works by Jean Charlot*, which was on view in the spring and summer of 2011 at The San Diego Museum of Art, located Charlot as an international artist, as opposed to an artist simply affiliated with Mexico, and emphasized works created in France, the United States, Hawai‘i, and Fiji.³⁷

In terms of specific reference to Charlot’s religious works, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and the Way of the Cross* (Spring 2008), organized by Bronwen Solyom, Curator of the Jean Charlot Collection, was a revealing and comprehensive look at the ways in which Charlot rendered the Stations of the Cross for some sixty years. The exhibition was on view at the Hamilton Library’s Bridge Galley at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Marcia Rickard, a recently retired Professor at St. Mary’s College in South Bend, Indiana has done work on the Charlot murals in South Bend (both at St. Mary’s and the University of Notre Dame) and also on the religious connections between the writings of Paul Claudel (1868–1955) and Jean Charlot.³⁸ Caroline Klarr’s 2005 dissertation brought much-needed attention to Charlot’s mural cycle in a small church in the province of Ra in the Fiji Islands.³⁹ While a number of scholars have addressed Charlot’s religious works, there is still more work to be done. Artists who engaged with the liturgical arts during the mid-twentieth century have often been ignored by scholars, as their art has been viewed as outside of avant-garde trends. Important artists such as Charlot and Ramos Martínez, however, produced religious-inspired works that are worthy of closer examination.

³⁶ Breanne Robertson, “Forging a New World Nationalism: Ancient Mexico in United States Art and Visual Culture, 1933-1945,” (PhD diss, University of Maryland, n.d.).

³⁷ No catalogue was published in association with this exhibition.

³⁸ Marcia Rickard, “Jean Charlot and Paul Claudel: Apocalyptic Visions,” (working paper, Department of Art, St. Mary’s College, 2011).

³⁹ Caroline Klarr, “Painting Paradise for a Post-Colonial Pacific: The Fijian Frescoes of Jean Charlot,” (PhD diss, Florida State University, 2005).

As with Charlot, Ramos Martínez's family has helped to promote the work of the artist. Ramos Martínez's wife wrote a book of memories about the artist after he died.⁴⁰ Though the work reads as clearly subjective, it also provides intimate information about the artist from someone who lived with him and saw him work regularly. Ramos Martínez's daughter, María Ramos Martínez Bolster, has aided many inquiries about her father as well. She has informed the work of scholar Margarita Nieto and also the organizer of the forthcoming Ramos Martínez catalogue raisonné, Louis Stern. Stern owns a prominent gallery in Los Angeles and produced two significant publications on the works of Ramos Martínez, to which Nieto made considerable contributions.⁴¹ Nieto is regarded as the foremost scholar on Ramos Martínez working in the United States. In addition to Nieto's work, George Small contributed an early work on Ramos Martínez, though some of the analysis is now outdated.⁴² Perhaps the most helpful source on Ramos Martínez published in recent years is the exhibition catalogue *Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Una vision retrospectiva*, which includes essays by a number of leading scholars on the artist's work. Nieto's essay on Ramos Martínez's time in Los Angeles proved to be particularly helpful in illuminating details about the artist's transition from Mexico to the United States.⁴³ Ramón Favela's contribution to the book includes valuable information

⁴⁰ María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, trans. Berta de Lecuona (Los Angeles, CA: Martínez Foundation, 1949), 22.

⁴¹ Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009); Margarita Nieto, "The Game of Circumstance," 16–18.

⁴² George Raphael Small, *Ramos Martínez: His Life & Art*, ed. Jerald Slattum (Westlake Village, CA: F & J Publishing Corporation, 1975).

⁴³ Margarita Nieto, "Alfredo Ramos Martínez en Los Angeles: El azar y el recuerdo," in *Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946): Una visión retrospectiva* (Mexico: Museo del Arte Nacional, 1992), 83–95.

on Ramos Martínez's exhibitions in Paris and his correspondence with the American Phoebe Hearst (1842–1919), who supported the artist's trip to Paris.⁴⁴

B. Frameworks for Analysis

Notions of place, colonialism, and performance are integral to the following analysis. These concepts enhance understanding about the American artists who traveled to Mexico and the inspiration they experienced upon witnessing, studying, and in some cases contributing to the Mexican mural movement. In terms of the notion of place, the ways the Mexican muralists changed American artists reflect the fundamental significance of place because it was the political climate in Mexico, combined with a long history of government-supported arts programs and a rich tradition of art-making, that led to the Mexican mural movement, gave the murals a dramatic stage, buoyed the muralists, and made popular the names of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros. Long after the murals of Mexico were fashionable, American artists carried on making the trip south of the US/Mexico Border, and the influence of the muralists continued to resonate in their work.

Since the study of Charlot and Ramos Martínez is so intricately tied to place, thinking about the many meanings and functions of place and how place operates as a mechanism for understanding contributes to this analysis. For many decades, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has eloquently written about the power of place. He explains that:

Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other. There is no place like home. What is home? It is the old homestead, the old

⁴⁴ Ramón Favela, "Apuntes documentales para un estudio de la obra de Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946) durante la época de la Academia (Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1890-99) y de París (1900–1910)," in *Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946): Una visión retrospectiva* (Mexico: Museo del Arte Nacional, 1992), 17–32.

neighborhood, hometown, or motherland. Geographers study places. Planners would like to evoke “a sense of place.” These are unexceptional ways of speaking. Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meanings and raise questions we have not thought to ask.⁴⁵

Indeed, place exists as an unexceptional word when discussed frequently and applied to daily circumstances. When we take this “basic component of the lived world,” however, and think about the emotions tied to it, the political events that take place within it or because of it, and the economic benefits reaped and destroyed through its use, place becomes a potent idea tied not only to individual identity, but also to a community’s identity.

Cultural, political, economic, and often emotional associations within particular places result in profound connections to specified locales. Furthermore, signs and symbols call to mind places. Locations such as Coyoacán, Mexico inspire specific emotions tied to individual geographical circumstances and particular aspects of the built environment. For example, on a Sunday in Coyoacán, the central plaza fills with people. Families and vendors collide to create a flurry of activity. At night young adults pack the quaint cafés that line the plaza and music plays loudly. The church, founded by sixteenth-century Franciscan friars, sees regular visitors. Some people simply walk in, move toward the front, turn around, and leave, while others stop for a moment and offer a brief prayer.⁴⁶ A specified place and a strong reaction to that place may be personal, but certainly the example above relates to the communal identity of a group as opposed to simply an individual experience. Many people identify Coyoacán as a place of

⁴⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

⁴⁶ These observations were made during several trips to Coyoacán, most recently in March of 2010.

significance. They view it as the place where Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) grew up or where Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) sought refuge from Stalinist Russia. With these specific people, a collective group is associated with a particular location. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, Coyoacán proved to be significant in both artists' lives.

A colonial framework infuses the idea that American artists came to Mexico, gleaned inspiration, returned to their home country, and refashioned their influences into something else. Thus, the American artists could be viewed as conducting a type of foreign invasion, extracting ideas and then reaping the benefits upon returning to their birth country. Indeed, there is something ironic about the fact that American painters working on a Rivera mural in Mexico that presents workers waving red flags with the words “Tierra” and “Libertad” (Land and Liberty) would return to the United States and create less political and less controversial subject matter. The interpretive reactions to the Mexican murals are examples of hybridity.⁴⁷ Following the definition of hybridity developed by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, the murals by Charlot and Ramos Martínez were formed in a colonial context and the end result is something new—not decidedly a copy of something born of Mexico, but an entirely new entity with roots in both the United States and Mexico. Bhabha writes,

What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Both Charlot and Ramos Martínez, though deeply influenced by Mexico, are a part of an international movement and their work functions in-between spaces of cultural identity and the accepted norms of the art world. Furthermore, Bhabha states,

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.⁴⁹

In the United States, Charlot and Ramos Martínez produced performances as muralists. They negotiated their own identities as artists influenced by Mexican muralism, and they were forever changed by their knowledge of Mexican culture, specifically indigenous tradition. As the “American Century” unfolded, each artist realized murals that function as cultural hybrids born of their experiences in France, Mexico, and ultimately the United States.

Nonetheless, the colonial attitudes inherent in the great American inspiration to make murals during the 1930s derived from similar sensibilities among the Mexican muralists themselves.⁵⁰ For example, the indigenous populations of Mexico were emphasized by the Mexican muralists and later by many American artists who went to Mexico. In their portrayal of the diverse native populations they saw something *exotic*. Often, the indigenous cultures were presented as *innocent* and *untouched* by modernity and therefore represented the *true* Mexico.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁰ While the 1930s saw a flourish of mural-making in the U.S., it is important to note that the impulse to make murals was popular before the influence of Mexican muralism. The Mexican mural movement enhanced mural production in the U.S., but it did not initiate it.

Colonialism also figures literally in the murals and their subsequent influence. The Mexican muralists referred to colonial events in their work. Siqueiros's *Death to the Invader* at La Escuela Mexicana, Rivera's portrayal of a sickly Hernán Cortes at the Palacio Nacional, and Orozco's large portrait of Hernán Cortes and La Malinche at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (popularly known as the National Preparatory School) are examples of the many works created by the muralists that literally referenced the colonial period. More broadly, there were also works that addressed Catholicism. For example, Orozco's *Christ Destroying the Cross*, 1922-24 revealed the dramatic and allegorical nature of Catholicism.⁵¹ Catholicism and mural-making possessed a long history, and the way in which particular artists such as Charlot and Ramos Martínez continued that history will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Making and viewing murals is intertwined with performance. Large-scale murals involve the orchestration of a number of components to produce a single work of art. Moreover, the artists' physical dynamic with the wall on which they create their work is also a type of performance. In particular application to this study, the translation of the mural process represents a performance as artists alter themselves through the inspiration they experience. Also, Charlot and Ramos Martínez's connection to Catholicism and their creation of murals in religious spaces evoke the many performative aspects of Catholicism.

American artists negotiated their own identities as artists after experiencing the work of the Mexican muralists. For the most part, their responses to Mexican muralism

⁵¹ "Christ destroying His cross" was a motif that Orozco returned to several times during his career. Most notably, he also included the representation in his mural at Dartmouth College in 1922-24. Much later in 1943, Orozco completed an oil on canvas, *Christ Destroying his Cross*, which is now in the collection of the Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil in Mexico City.

were far from mimetic performances; instead, they took ownership of their inspiration and produced nuanced interpretations that reflected diverse influences ranging from technique to thematic and iconographic concepts. While in certain cases, contemporary Mexican and Mexican American muralists have evoked the portraits of *los tres grandes* or referred directly to the modern Mexican murals, for the most part the Americans who responded, roughly from 1920 to 1950, to the work of the muralists presented their own interpretations of Mexican muralism. Following the end of the Mexican Revolution, American artists engaged with Mexican art readily; not only did these artists reconceive Mexican muralism, but they also reinvented themselves.

C. Cultural Context in Mexico

In 1921, Mexico was experiencing a distinctly different reality from that of the United States during the same year.⁵² The aftermath of the Mexican Revolution led to widespread destruction as over one million people lost their lives, countless families were displaced, and thousands of villages were destroyed. The country was ravaged by war, but from its ashes emerged a cosmopolitan capital city that served as the birthplace of several major artistic movements, and specifically, Mexican muralism.⁵³ Many heroic icons emerged from the Revolution, in particular Pancho Villa (1878–1923) and Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919). Tales of their militaristic accomplishments contributed to their

⁵² While the U.S. faced a short economic depression from 1920–1921, the decade of the 1920s is typically characterized as a time of dynamic change, and often represented through the elegant and festive dress of flappers and the complex rhythms of jazz music.

⁵³ At the same time that a major mural movement was born in Mexico, other art forms and types of art flourished. Surrealism had a major impact on the city as foreign-born artists like Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), Remedios Varo (1908–1963), Alice Rahon (1904–1987), and Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959) made the city their home. Furthermore, sixteen years after Rivera completed his first mural in Mexico City, the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) was born. The TGP attracted both Mexican and foreign-born artists with its mission to create prints for mass consumption that addressed political and cultural themes.

iconic status and ultimately, repeated reference to them in the art of the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in the work of Rivera and Siqueiros. Orozco chose a much more critical look at the Revolution and its “heroes” and avoided celebrating the spoils of war.

After the fighting of the Mexican Revolution ceased, many of the issues that had served as a catalyst for the rebellion—such as the need for better land distribution—persisted. Throughout the Mexican Revolution, artists worked in Mexico. Photographers such as Agustín Casasola (born in Mexico, 1874–1938), Sumner Matheson (born in the US, 1867–1920), and Hugo Brehme (born in Germany, 1882–1954) captured the country during a time of tremendous political upheaval. Siqueiros fought in the Revolution, while Orozco could not take part in the fighting of the Revolution in part due to a childhood accident; he referred to the period as a “carnival.”⁵⁴

José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), the Minister of Education, inaugurated a cultural revolution in Mexico by enlisting painters to transform the walls of their native country. The modern murals were new manifestations of an old practice in Mexico, as murals existed in the country long before Vasconcelos’s initiative. Pre-Columbian temples and sixteenth-century monastery complexes possessed murals, and nineteenth-century artists such as Juan Cordero painted murals that preceded the twentieth-century masters; however, the murals created in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution altered the history of visual culture forever.⁵⁵ The government’s role in the beginning of the Mexican

⁵⁴ José Clemente Orozco, *José Clemente Orozco: An Autobiography*, trans. Robert C. Stephenson (1962; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 40–41.

⁵⁵ Jean Charlot, “Juan Cordero: A Nineteenth-Century Mexican Muralist,” *The Art Bulletin* 28, no.4 (December 1946):248–265; Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia*

mural movement proved fruitful and provided a catalyst and steady support for mural-making.

As the artists who were called to participate in the mural movement joined the artistic vision set forth by Vasconcelos and others, they also banded together and established the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters, and Sculptors. In 1923, the Union published their manifesto in *El Machete*, a Mexico City-based newspaper written for workers.⁵⁶ Their manifesto began with the dedication, “To the Indian race humiliated for centuries; to soldiers made executioners by the praetorians; to workers and peasants scourged by the greed of the rich; to intellectuals uncorrupted by the bourgeoisie.”⁵⁷ The statement was brief and signed by Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco, Xavier Guerrero (1896–1974), Fermín Revueltas (1901–1935), Germán Cueto (1883–1975), and Carlos Mérida (1891–1984). The twentieth-century Mexican muralists seized the remnants of the Revolution, choosing to create works that championed land distribution and celebrated the indigenous population. Simultaneously, some muralists contributed to a growing tendency to define modern Mexico by referring to major historical events and furthering their own personal objectives in their dedication to Communism.

To live in Mexico City and participate in the visual arts during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, was an immense experience filled with political and cultural change. Rivera’s three-tiered murals at the Ministry of Education building are just a few blocks away from his

and *Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Mary Miller, *The Murals of Bonampak* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁵⁶ *El Machete* was founded in 1924 by Siqueiros, Rivera, and Xávier Guerrero. Siqueiros designed the masthead for the paper.

⁵⁷ “Manifesto of the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters and Sculptors,” in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 323–324.

enormous works engulfing the grandiose staircases at the National Palace. Both Orozco and Rivera painted murals at the National Preparatory School from 1922 to 1924, and Orozco created large-scale works within the Supreme Court Building in 1941. As each larger-than-life mural appeared on prominent walls in Mexico, the murals inspired Mexicans and foreigners alike. Mexico City was a rich place with a vibrant art scene. From approximately 1920-1950, muralists, printmakers, and foreign-born surrealists contributed to a rebirth in the visual arts. While much was made of the New York City art scene in the first half of the twentieth century, Mexico City also emerged as a major art capital during this time. Foreigners from other parts of Latin America and Europe arrived in Mexico and became inspired by the culture they encountered. As a group, however, artists from the United States became the most enthralled with the Mexican cultural renaissance triggered by the mural movement. The proximity to Mexico granted American artists an easy journey to Mexico. Although the mural movement was centered in Mexico City, murals emerged throughout the country. Similarly, many American artists first arrived in Mexico City, but some ventured to other regions.⁵⁸

D. Setting the Scene in the United States

A great exchange of ideas about murals occurred both in the United States and in Mexico. The physical presence of the muralists in the United States was a major factor in

⁵⁸ Oaxaca was a frequent source of inspiration. Both foreign-born and Mexican artists became motivated by the indigenous cultures of this southern state. In particular, the women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec were portrayed by Modotti, Rivera, Rufino Tamayo (1899–1991), and many others. The Yucatán peninsula, which was the ancient home of the Maya, brought many foreigners to Mexico and served as artistic inspiration dating back to nineteenth-century artists and chroniclers like John Lloyd Stephens (1805–1852), Frederic Catherwood (1799–1854), and Alexander Von Humboldt (1769–1859). In the twentieth century, the American Alma Reed (1889–1966)—who later became Orozco’s art dealer in the United States—and the Mexican painter and muralist Raúl Anguiano (1915–2006), were examples of artists who visited and were greatly influenced by the Yucatán.

their widespread influence. Rivera painted murals in San Francisco, Detroit, and New York. Siqueiros worked in Los Angeles and New York. During the height of the mural movement in Mexico, Orozco spent several years in New York and accepted commissions to create works at Pomona College in California and Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. The mere presence of these artists in the United States allowed for a whole generation of American artists to be exposed to their work. For example, in the years preceding his signature style, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) came under the influence of both Orozco and Siqueiros in New York.

Other American artists such as John Sloan (1871–1951), who is associated with the Ashcan School, were affected by Mexican muralism.⁵⁹ Sloan, an important American painter noted for his portrayals of New York City life, interacted with both Orozco and Rivera in New York. Sloan did not travel to Mexico nor did his art reflect the influence of the muralists, but his support of their work emphasizes the way in which the muralists had seeped into the consciousness of American artists. “The Mexican triumvirate of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, was for Sloan, an example of the power that nonabstract art still retained, and he regarded Rivera as the paradigm of an artist who had profited by his study of Cubism yet moved on to even more distinctive accomplishments.”⁶⁰ Sloan had first met Rivera and his then wife Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City during October of 1933.⁶¹ Beyond respecting the technique and style

⁵⁹ The Ashcan School is a misnomer because it was not a formal school of art. Instead, the term Ashcan School refers to a group of American artists that includes Robert Henri (1865–1929) and George Wesley Bellows (1882–1925) who favored urban realism.

⁶⁰ John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 319.

⁶¹ Ibid.

of the muralists, Sloan expressed support of Rivera in the ensuing debate surrounding the painter's ill-fated mural at Rockefeller Center.

Although Orozco's mural cycles in California, New Hampshire, and New York were significant, his time in New York was not always positive. He struggled in New York City and found it difficult to find a market for his work. In fact, he lamented that fellow Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo seemed to find much more support.⁶² While Orozco struggled to show his work, Rivera was honored with one of his most important exhibition opportunities. When Rivera received a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1931, it marked only the second solo exhibition in the Museum's history.⁶³ For this exhibition, Rivera was commissioned to create several movable frescoes.⁶⁴ In comparison to Rivera and Orozco, Siqueiros was slightly less successful in the United States, taking on only three mural projects in California and briefly living in New York where he founded his Experimental Workshop, a space that was visited by several upcoming artists such as Pollock.⁶⁵ Siqueiros created three murals in Los Angeles. He worked briefly at the Chouinard Art School where he made a mural, *Street Meeting*, for teaching purposes.⁶⁶ In 1932, Siqueiros created a private commission, *Portrait of Mexico Today*, for a movie director in Hollywood that is now on view at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. His most famous mural in the United States, *La América*

⁶² Though murals by Tamayo are on view at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City alongside major murals by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco, Tamayo worked outside of the prevalent mural tradition that took place from 1920 to 1950 in Mexico. Tamayo was critical of the muralists and did not view their work as revolutionary.

⁶³ The honor of the first solo exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in New York was bestowed upon Pablo Picasso.

⁶⁴ In late 2011, an exhibition, *Diego Rivera: Murals for The Museum of Modern Art*, opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and presented five of the eight moveable frescoes Rivera painted in the city.

⁶⁵ Stephen Polcari, "Orozco and Pollock: Epic Transfigurations," *American Art* 6, no.3 (Summer 1992), 37–57.

⁶⁶ This mural was later destroyed.

Tropical, 1932, created on Olvera Street in Los Angeles, is currently undergoing major renovation.⁶⁷

While murals of Mexico tend to conjure the thoughts of Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, the mural movement consisted of more than the contribution of three men. At the heart of the mural production rests the work of many. Every muralist is helped by assistants who make the production of a single work possible. Stephen Pope Dimitroff (1910–1966), Miné Okubo (1912–2001), Ione Robinson (1910–1989), Mark Rogovin (b.1947), and Ely de Vescovi (1910–1998) are among the many that contributed to the murals produced by Mexican artists. Okubo aided Diego Rivera's *Pan American Unity*, 1940, now housed at San Francisco City College in San Francisco, California. Robinson worked on Rivera's mural cycle at the National Palace in Mexico City and as mentioned previously, her book, *A Wall to Paint On* (1946), consists of many intimate letters that reveal the impact of muralism in both her professional and personal life. Many artists who initially found work as assistants, such as Lucienne Bloch (1909–1999), Xavier Guerrero (1896–1974), Pablo O'Higgins (1904–1983), Emmy Lou Packard (1914–1998), Ben Shahn (1898–1969), and Philip Stein (1919–2009), eventually led their own mural projects. Ben Shahn helped with Rivera's ill-fated Rockefeller Center project, *Man at the Crossroads*, 1934, and later created his own mural projects including a WPA-sponsored mural at Jersey Homesteads (now the town of Roosevelt) in New Jersey. Stein worked with Siqueiros on projects such as *The People for the University*, *The University for the*

⁶⁷ The Getty Foundation supplied major funding to restore the mural which was whitewashed due to its controversial content. The mural portrays a Mexican migrant worker crucified on a cross.

People, 1952–56 at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and eventually created one of his own murals at the Village Vanguard, a jazz club in New York City.⁶⁸

The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration was created in response to current events, specifically widespread economic depression, but not in reaction to war. “The walls of public buildings across the country bear silent testimony to America’s great experiment in federal support for the arts. Post offices and court building are ablaze with the colors of murals; parks, public squares, and civic centers are decorated with sculpture created during the great Depression under the auspices of the federal art programs.”⁶⁹ The murals of the WPA lacked the ferocity of composition and vision, the leftist political sentiments, and the anger expressed in many of the best-known Mexican murals. The WPA murals were government-sponsored enterprises that relied heavily on the approval of both elected officials and the local community. While certain Mexican murals, like those created by Rivera at the National Palace and the Ministry of Education, were also government-supported initiatives, the same freedom of expression was not extended to the muralists in both countries. For example, Edward Millman’s mural *Contribution of Women to the Progress of Mankind* at the Lucy Flower High School in Chicago, 1936 was whitewashed due to its “controversial content” as it was deemed depressing.⁷⁰

In the United States during the 1930s, some of the radically inclined artists joined the John Reed Club or had their work published in *New Masses* and *Art Front*, both leftist

⁶⁸ The Village Vanguard is located at 178 7th Avenue South, Greenwich Village, New York City.

⁶⁹ Orville O. Clarke, Jr., “Social Statements in Art: W.P.A. Murals,” *Antiques and Fine Art* (November-December 1987):55.

⁷⁰ Heather Becker, *Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive and W.P.A. -Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904-1943* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 132.

and progressive publications. Charlot and Ramos Martínez were not actively engaged with the John Reed Club or any other Communist organization. Several American artists such as Mitchell Siporin (1910–1976), Anton Refregier (1905–1979), and Morris Topchevsky (1899–1947) who were greatly influenced by Mexican murals, were also members of the John Reed Club. Furthermore, in 1936, the less partisan American Artists' Congress attracted members of the John Reed Club due to its commitment to supporting art that presents socially relevant material, but still did not find Charlot or Ramos Martínez among its members.⁷¹ Charlot was more active with American artists and their organizations, but Ramos Martínez remained less connected and less affiliated with overtly political organizations in the United States.⁷²

Recipients of major commissions in Mexico were typically men, while women often took supporting roles in the movement, often serving as assistants and models.⁷³ A European immigrant, Fanny Rabel (1922–2008), created murals in Mexico City through her relationship with Kahlo, who served as a teacher and mentor to the young Rabel and likely contributed to her student's access to such commissions.⁷⁴ American women participated in the mural movement as well. Sisters Grace (1905–1979) and Marion Greenwood (1909–1970) witnessed the murals of Mexico, painting a few of their own in

⁷¹ Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, "'New Masses' and John Reed Club Artists, 1926–1936: Evolution of Ideology, Subject Matter, and Style," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 12 (Spring 1989):56.

⁷² Dr. Margarita Nieto (Professor of Chicano/a Studies and Art History, Cal State Northridge), in discussion with the author, January 2012. There is no evidence that Ramos Martínez identified with any political organizations in Los Angeles.

⁷³ Many women participated in the W.P.A mural program in the United States. Also, several women produced post office murals. For example, Belle Baranceanu (1902–1988) created a mural in La Jolla, California from 1935–36 and Elise Seeds (1905–1963) completed a project in Oceanside, California in 1937.

⁷⁴ Rabel was a member of a small mural collective called Los Fridos that completed several small commissions in Mexico City. Later Rabel created a large mural on her own at the Jewish Athletic Club in Mexico City.

Mexico and others in the United States upon their return.⁷⁵ Emmy Lou Packard worked as an assistant to Rivera and was a personal confidante to the muralist and his wife Kahlo.⁷⁶ Packard learned the techniques of Rivera while working for him and simultaneously developed her own work. Photographers Tina Modotti (1896–1942) and Mariana Yampolsky (1925–2002) moved from the United States to Mexico and engaged with the indigenous cultures and revolutionary politics of Mexico.

E. Outline of the Dissertation

Following this introduction, Chapter II examines the work of Charlot. After reviewing the principal facts of his life, formative influences, and his training as an artist, two major aspects of his life and work are emphasized. In this chapter, I examine the breadth of his artistic production, with specific attention to his interest in Mexican and Hawaiian cultures, and his role as a producer of both secular and nonsecular arts in the continental United States. In Chapter III, I address the relationship between Catholicism and Charlot's work. His murals created for religious spaces provide an opportunity to understand his work in new ways and to evaluate the diverse translations of muralism. Charlot is often referenced as a minor figure in analyses about the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s in Mexico. This study changes that perception by positioning him as an important figure in the development of Mexican muralism and as a major catalyst for the spread of muralism in the United States.

⁷⁵ American artists Grace and Marion Greenwood, Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), and Pablo O'Higgins were all commissioned by the Mexican government to create murals at the Mercado Abelardo L. Rodríguez in Mexico City. Marion Greenwood also created murals in Taxco and Morelia.

⁷⁶ Although well documented as assistants, the legacy of many of the American women who engaged with murals suffers from the scarcity of their work to study.

Chapter IV focuses on the work of Alfredo Ramos Martínez. Charlot and Ramos Martínez share much in common in terms of their perceived roles as outsiders to the core group of famed muralists occupied by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco. In fact, both Charlot and Ramos Martínez worked during the 1920s in Mexico and interacted with some of the best-known painters in Mexico. Furthermore, they share in common a commitment and a passion for Catholicism and the traditional cultures of Mexico. In expressing their affinity for indigenous customs of Mexico in the work they produced in the United States, both artists participated in the construction of a specific type of Mexican identity. Beyond drawing a comparison between the two artists, Chapter IV provides biographical material on Ramos Martínez and addresses the murals he created in Ensenada (Mexico), San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles. As a Mexican artist who moved back and forth across the US/Mexico Border, Ramos Martínez created art that satisfied American patrons and reinforced a romantic perception of Mexican identity in the United States, but simultaneously demonstrated a commitment to social justice and Catholicism.

Chapter V delves further into the relationships between the artistic vision of Charlot and Ramos Martínez. Furthermore, Chapter V focuses on the quest for social justice present in works by Charlot and Ramos Martínez. This chapter includes a discussion of how the development of modern religious history in Mexico affected these artists. To conclude this analysis, Chapter VI briefly addresses the continued relevance of murals in the United States and the legacy of Charlot and Ramos Martínez. The conclusion stresses how the examples of Charlot and Ramos Martínez offer strong case

studies because their work reveals both traditional and nontraditional ways in which they were inspired by Mexican muralism.

F. Conclusion

After Mexico, Charlot worked in diverse areas of the United States such as Georgia, Colorado, Kansas, and finally Hawai‘i, where he spent the last three decades of his life. In the United States, Charlot painted many murals and taught at numerous universities across the country where he influenced generations of students. His teaching focused on fresco painting and the traditions of the Mexican muralists, specifically Orozco, who was a close friend. Although based in Hawai‘i, Charlot continued to travel. He created murals and prints inspired by his experiences in the Fiji Islands. Hawai‘i became Charlot’s permanent residence, and he died there at the age of eighty-one in 1979. His legacy continues through his enormous artistic production that portrays his individualistic response to a well-traveled life.

When Ramos Martínez left Mexico for the United States, his work became transformed. He increasingly made work about the country he had left behind, emphasizing the topography, traditional culture, and indigenous people of Mexico. Moreover, he became a muralist outside of Mexico. Although he knew the muralists in Mexico and inspired many of them, it was in the United States that he embraced his role as a muralist. He returned to Mexico twice for mural commissions, but for the most part he led his life in California after the 1920s. He died in 1947 while completing a project at Scripps College in Claremont, California. Ramos Martínez’s work testifies to the fact that art can transcend the physical border that lies between the United States and Mexico.

Ultimately, the impact of Mexican murals reinforced Social Realism in the United States, inspired the mural division managed under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, promoted public art, and offered new opportunities for artists to consider Mexico. All of these assertions have been examined by other books, essays, and exhibitions. My project aims to provoke further dialogue regarding the dynamic, historic, and ever-present cultural exchange between Mexico and the United States through an analysis of the work of Charlot and Ramos Martínez. The distinct ways in which my dissertation differs from previous analyses is its grouping of two under-recognized artists, placing an emphasis on their religious works in the United States, and by addressing a wide variety of work by both artists, a majority of which has never been discussed before in any thorough or critical manner.

II. JEAN CHARLOT

The life story and multitude of work produced by Jean Charlot reveal an artist who traveled frequently, but who sought great inspiration from local environments. Charlot was not an artist who reveled in what was fashionable; instead he pioneered new techniques and emphasized the frequently neglected popular arts and daily life experiences of the people. He managed to create a diverse body of work that simultaneously synthesized Cubism, pre-Columbian art, and everyday life in Hawai'i. Charlot once stated, "One of the things that has guided me all through life is that I don't like 'art.' I don't like 'art for art.' What I am trying to do, and did even before I went to Mexico is art for the people. That's why I am so fond of the Images d'Epinal [French folk prints], penny-sheets, Posada, and so forth."⁷⁷ With this declaration, Charlot expressed the passionate point of view that would influence him throughout his long and varied career. Charlot was not interested in art for art's sake. He favored art of the people and an inclusive definition of the arts.

Charlot's artistic production is impressive. In terms of his visual art, he often repeated iconography and recorded certain images in his memory that served as the great inspiration for future works. During his life he completed more than fifty murals in addition to mosaics, small- and large-scale sculptures, numerous prints, and easel paintings. Though Charlot experienced professional disappointment in his career, for the most part, he was immensely successful.⁷⁸ He was celebrated with more than one-

⁷⁷ Morse, vii.

⁷⁸ As will be referenced later, a canceled mural commission and a destroyed mural were deeply troubling to Charlot.

hundred solo exhibitions, and his work was acquired by numerous private and public collections.

The facts of an artist's biography are often stated in great detail. Well-known biographies of artists such as Frida Kahlo and Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) labored to provide ancestral information for the artists they examine, so much so that they beg the question as to how significant are relatives and ancestors in the formulation of an artist's individual identity.⁷⁹ In the case of Charlot, however, his initial experiences, along with the history of his family were extremely important, and they had a tremendous effect on the artist.

A. Early Biography

Born in Paris in 1898, Charlot was encouraged by his family in his pursuit of art and his curiosity of diverse cultures. Charlot's parents, Anne and Henri, supported his love of art and his studious ways. In particular, it was his mother who recognized his earliest drawings as possessing great artistic merit. She was an artist herself with a small studio in the family's summer home where she painted. Her subjects were those around her including her son, Jean.⁸⁰ Charlot later recounted, "I was a model, an artist's model, before I became an artist."⁸¹ Charlot's mother was not a society lady who took up drawing as a pastime; she had studied art seriously at the Académie Julian and later at the Grande Chaumière and with the great French history painter Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–

⁷⁹ Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *deKooning: An American Master* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

⁸⁰ Jean Charlot had one sibling, a sister named Odette Charlot (1895–1977).

⁸¹ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

1904).⁸² Due to his parents' diverse heritage, Charlot grew up in an atypical Parisian family. Members of his mother's family had lived in Mexico since the 1820s, and his father was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. The exact identity of the artist's Russian grandfather remains unknown.⁸³

Charlot was raised in a comfortable financial environment. His father's import and export company was successful, and therefore, the family was able to live in an established area of Paris and spend time in both the city and the country. Most important, as a budding artist, Charlot was permitted to pursue his creative impulses. Located a few minutes from the Charlot family's home in Paris, the church La Collégiale Notre-Dame de Poissy was built largely during the twelfth century, and it was a stunning example of religious architecture as it demonstrated the transition from the Romanesque to Gothic aesthetic. Scholar John Charlot asserts that his father's childhood in Paris greatly influenced his appreciation for art and his interest in religious spaces. In particular, Charlot contends that his father found the church of La Collégiale Notre-Dame de Poissy and the art within it to be of profound importance.⁸⁴

During his adolescence in France, Charlot further developed an interest in local popular art, a curiosity that would later be particularly prominent in his work in Mexico and Hawai'i. From a young age Charlot desired to travel to Mexico, as his curiosity had been piqued by family stories about the country. His maternal grandfather was born in Mexico in 1840. His great uncle Eugène Espidon Goupil collected historic Mexican

⁸² John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, Chapter 2.4 Immediate Family," (book manuscript, Department of Religion, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 2006).

⁸³ —, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, Chapter 2.4 The Immediate Family." (book manuscript, Department of Religion, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 2006).

⁸⁴ —, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, Chapters 2.2 The Paternal Side and 2.3 The Maternal Side."

manuscripts and other pre-Columbian artifacts. Goupil purchased an extensive collection of materials from Joseph Marius Alexis Aubin (1802-1891), a historian who had largely kept the materials away from public view. Aubin lived in Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century, and he was one of the founders of the Société Américaine de France in 1857.⁸⁵ In fact, Goupil's widow donated his collection to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris in 1898, and it remains one of the most highly regarded collections of colonial and ancient Mexican manuscripts in existence.⁸⁶ Beyond his interaction with manuscripts, Charlot was also exposed at an early age to ancient artifacts. For his first communion, Charlot received a small pre-Columbian whistle.⁸⁷ Furthermore, during the French occupation of Mexico, members of the artist's family served as advisors to the French archaeologists. Indeed, Charlot's later works of pre-Columbian culture were strongly rooted in the history of his family. His passion for folk art was due in part to the prominent role Catholicism played in his life from an early age. While many grand religious images were painted in prominent churches throughout Europe, ephemera and other forms of popular art such as medals, beads, and prayer cards were created to promote faithful practice in daily life.

The religious faith introduced to Charlot by his mother during his formative years, proved extraordinarily influential. Although Charlot's father maintained atheist views, his mother was a devout Catholic, and as a result of his deep connection to her and his own

⁸⁵ H.B. Nicholson, "The Native Tradition Pictorials in the Aubin-Goupil Collection of Mesoamerican Ethnohistorical Documents in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: Major Reproductions and Studies," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* (1998):35–50, 84–2.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 40–45. An abbreviated list of items in the Aubin-Goupil collection includes: *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (1116–1544), *Codex Xolotl* (1244 c. 1427), *Codex en Cruz* (1402–1569), The Map of Quinatzin (c. 1542), *Codex Mexicanus* (late sixteenth century), and *Codex Ixtlilxochitl* (c. 1600). In addition to these materials, other works include various colonial administrative and legal documents and dated Nahuatl histories.

⁸⁷ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, Chapter 5.1 The Illness and Death of Henri Charlot."

personal interest in Christian faith, Charlot embraced religious practice and liturgical art. Charlot later wrote, “Mother’s sweet proddings churchwise and father’s caustic, amused disapproval proved an unmatched combination for devotion. I could thus simultaneously obey and rebel, be docile and choose a path of my own.”⁸⁸ The distinctive opportunity to be both loyal to his mother and rebellious to his father produced a passionate liturgical artist. As a teenager, he joined the Gilde Notre Dame and his earliest works were spiritually motivated. The Gilde, which included among its members painters, glass artists, sculptors, liturgical cloth designers, embroiders, and other specialists in decorative religious arts, provided a great source of intellectual and artistic inspiration for the young Charlot. He recounted, “As I grew up, the making of liturgical art became the common ground between my devotion and vocation.”⁸⁹ During his formative years, Charlot discovered a way to meld his passions for art and religion.

Many of the artists involved in the Gilde were committed to bringing new energy and perspectives to liturgical art, a goal that was of great interest to the young Charlot and that would remain with the artist for the rest of his life. The Gilde also provided an intellectual forum in which members and guest speakers offered lectures. Charlot documented important lectures, in addition to giving a few talks to the membership of the Gilde. At this time in his career, he created several wood-relief sculptures intended for church spaces. Although he completed multiple versions of these works, only one early relief from approximately 1918 is known to exist (fig. 1).⁹⁰ This relief is unfinished, but clearly depicts a female figure, and the shape of the work implies that it belongs in a

⁸⁸ Jean Charlot, “Jean Charlot,” *Born Catholics* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1954), 99.

⁸⁹ —, *Born Catholics*, 101.

⁹⁰ John Charlot (Professor of Religion, University of Hawai‘i and the artist’s son), in discussion with the author, February 2, 2011.

niche or church window. These early experiences contributed to his development as an artist engaged in creating art for a community and art that would be used in conjunction with religious services.

From 1914 to 1915, Charlot studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, and after he spent time in Brittany, a region in the northwest portion of France, he developed an interest in local popular art. The Breton peasants, the traditional ways in which they lived their lives, and the material culture they produced were the beginning of a pattern of personal responses to diverse places that the artist experienced throughout his career. While Brittany was an influence, Charlot also traveled to Épinal to meet a family of artists who created the folk prints that he so admired. During his life, Charlot compiled three distinct collections: the images d'Épinal, prints by Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), and prints by José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). The images d'Épinal in Charlot's possession were colorful and presented a high concentration of figures. There were two major types of these prints in his collections: battle scenes or works that record social customs (figs. 2-3). Charlot marveled at Daumier's artistic skill and recognized him as one of the greatest artists of the nineteenth century. He saw the great irony in the fact that Daumier had his first solo exhibition at age 65 and that it met with little success.⁹¹ Typical examples of Posada's work often present details of current events, sensationalized stories, or romantic tales of love. Charlot collected different types of Posada's prints, including Posada's Catholic-inspired pieces. Charlot's collection contained Posada's portraits of Christ from the Sanctuary of Otatitlán and Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos (fig. 4).

⁹¹ Transcript of Jean Charlot's speech for the Fine Arts Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado on August 1, 1947, 1-9:4-5. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Archives.

Charlot's artistic production slowed down during World War I when he served as an artillery officer. During his service, he traveled to several towns in the Rhineland where he visited museums and bookstores. He began carving his important *Way of the Cross* series while fulfilling his duty to the French Army in Bavaria, and much of the series was carved while he was stationed in Occupied Germany. These works were later printed in 1920 as a set, and many years later in 1977, the artist reprinted the series.⁹² Shortly before Charlot left for Mexico, he exhibited the *Way of the Cross* at the Louvre Pavillion de Marsan in 1921. The exhibition included other works identified as modern Christian art, though Charlot's work was received negatively by some critics who deemed it as "sometimes too brutal."⁹³ Although Christ's last days reveal a tragedy filled with violent acts, Charlot's modern take on the sacred story appeared "brutal" to certain viewers. Throughout his career as a liturgical artist, Charlot would be faced with criticism about his nontraditional approach to religious imagery.

War was the backdrop for the artistic inspiration that led to Charlot's rendering of the Stations of the Cross. What might at first glance be seen as a body of work shaped solely by religious scripture was in fact very much informed by the events of the day. The physical struggle of the Passion paralleled the human struggle endured by many as a result of war. Like many of the muralists, Charlot was personally affected by the ravages of war, both in his service and the economic aftermath. The mural movement of the twentieth century straddles several major military conflicts: the Mexican Revolution

⁹² In 1977, when printer Lynton R. Kistler reproduced the *Way of the Cross* series, he used the wooden planks that the artist had kept with him since he began carving them in Germany and later brought them to France, Mexico, the continental United States, and Hawai'i.

⁹³ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, March 9–June 15, 2008. Extended labels. Jean Charlot Collection.

(1910–1920), World War I (1914–1918), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), and World War II (1939–1945). Therefore, many of the participants in the mural movement performed military service.⁹⁴ An early print by Charlot, *Les blessés au travail*, 1918 represents a soldier looking upward at a small angel figurine that he holds delicately in his hand (fig. 5). War and religion were the primary influences in the formation of Charlot's identity as a young artist. His experiences in the military and with the Gilde contributed to his role as an artist sensitive to the human condition and committed to social justice.

Charlot had joined the Gilde just as war was erupting, and his time there was preempted by his own military service, but he was quick to return to the group once he had finished his official duty during World War I. In the course of Charlot's time with the Gilde, the established artists who most inspired him were Maurice Denis (1870–1943),⁹⁵ Marcel Lenoir (1872–1931), and Georges Rouault (1871–1958).⁹⁶ Later, Charlot described these early influences, "I mentioned how we were looking for Catholic artists. By artists I meant painters at the time—Maurice Denis and so on. And of course Claudel as a Catholic poet helped round up the picture for me as a young fellow who was

⁹⁴ Siqueiros's participation in the Mexican Revolution began when he joined the army of General Carranza in 1914. After four years of fighting, he obtained the rank of captain. After the Revolution ended, Siqueiros was sent to Europe as a military attaché in honor of his brave and noteworthy achievements during the war. Siqueiros was in Europe from 1919 to 1921, spending time in France, Italy, and Spain. His military service contributed to the dramatic and at times violent murals that he created in Mexico. Additionally, it was as a result of the G.I. Bill, that American artist Philip Stein was given the opportunity to travel to San Miguel de Allende and study with Siqueiros, who briefly taught there, and began a mural that was never finished. Military service gave American artists an opportunity to travel to Mexico for further education.

⁹⁵ After early study at the Académie Julian and the École des Beaux-Arts, Denis became influential among liturgical artists in France. He created murals for several French churches and also painted the ceiling of the Champs Élysées Theatre in Paris.

⁹⁶ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work by John Charlot, 5.3. The Liturgical Art Movement, the Gilde Notre-Dame, and Charlot's Philosophy of Art."

trying to express myself, meaning my Catholic angle in art.”⁹⁷ In the opening decades of the twentieth century in France, Charlot was not without important religious artists and writers to admire.

Charlot’s first mural commission came after World War I. The intended piece was entitled *Processional* and was meant to depict individuals engaged in a march on the walls on either side of the nave leading into the sanctuary.⁹⁸ Charlot held with great excitement the blueprints approved by the priest and completed his own drawings for the proposed mural long before he received a note from the priest with the news that the commission was terminated.⁹⁹ This disappointment was a major catalyst for his departure to Mexico from his birth country of France.¹⁰⁰ The rejection of his work in France led to hope that he might find a different audience for his own distinctive interpretation of modernism. His situation with the canceled mural, however, was not the only time that he experienced rejection in terms of his mural aspirations, as further disappointment will be revealed later in this chapter.

As a young man, Charlot was left to care for the family business and for his mother.¹⁰¹ He did not have much of an interest (or talent) for business, so he and his mother sought new opportunities. Charlot’s mother lived with the artist throughout his twenties. Charlot first traveled to Mexico in early 1921, and after a brief stay, he returned

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 8.1.3.4.1.The History of the Project.” John Charlot stated that his father Jean used this title for the mural project in an interview that took place many years later on November 18, 1970.

⁹⁹ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 101.

¹⁰⁰ Due to economic constraints, Charlot and his mother were interested in relocation as Charlot had failed to manage the family business after his father’s death.

¹⁰¹ Charlot’s father died in 1915 and he remained extremely close with his mother until her death on January of 1929 in New York. Her death led the artist to have a mental breakdown.

to France and gathered his mother and their belongings, moving them to Mexico during the same year.¹⁰²

Mother and son arrived in Mexico at a time of great social and political change as a result of the tumultuous Revolution (1910-1920). With his mother, Charlot settled in the community of Coyoacán on the outskirts of Mexico City. The area of Coyoacán, now officially a part of the metropolis of Mexico City, was home to many of the avant-garde artists living in Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰³ Rivera and Kahlo lived in her ancestral home, the Blue House, located in the storied neighborhood. At the same time Charlot arrived in Mexico, the Mexican-born painter Rivera was returning from nearly two decades abroad to inaugurate the Mexican mural movement. After moving to the artistic area in 1921, Charlot quickly became a part of the leading artistic circle. He befriended many artists, including Weston, Modotti, and Orozco. Both Weston and Modotti created noteworthy portraits of Charlot.

In Mexico, Charlot was given the nickname, “the little Frenchman.” Although the majority of Charlot’s friends in Mexico City tended to be radical in their political views, his family in Mexico was not. The family members who welcomed his mother and him upon their arrival were more conservative and less favorable to the revolutionary politics championed by the Mexican muralists. In fact, the Charlot family, like much of the French community in Mexico City, supported Napoleon III’s intervention in Mexico and his approved administration of Maximilian (1832–1867), who ruled from 1862 to

¹⁰² Charlot returned to Paris for the first time in 1968 as described, along with other information about his time in Paris, in John Charlot, “The Formation of the Artist’s French Period,” *Jean Charlot: A Retrospective*, ed. Thomas Klobe (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery), 36.

¹⁰³ Long after settling in Coyoacán, the neighborhood continued to be a home to generations of artists. Painter and muralist Raúl Anguiano maintained his studio there until his death in 2006. Coyoacán provides an example of the power of place, the ability of a community to unite several artists through common location and experience.

1867.¹⁰⁴ Despite the distance between their political views, Charlot's family was always welcoming to his artist friends and many established congenial relationships with his mother. Siqueiros painted a portrait of Charlot's mother in 1932.¹⁰⁵ Although most of his friends and colleagues got along well with Charlot's family, Charlot wrote two angry letters to Anita Brenner¹⁰⁶ (1905–1974), the groundbreaking scholar and art critic, after he felt she had been rude to his mother.¹⁰⁷

Charlot proved to be a pioneer in Mexico, leading the experimentation of fresco techniques in the mural-making process and reviving interest in the great printmaker José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). The medium of fresco painting would become a major part of his life as he created fresco murals at forty-five different sites throughout his career.¹⁰⁸ He negotiated the art scene in Mexico City quickly and successfully, an impressive feat given his position as an immigrant and outsider. Charlot's status as a foreigner and his departure from the country in the late 1920s has lessened the notoriety of his impact in Mexico, although he has been celebrated in that country with major exhibitions. If he had stayed in Mexico and created the majority of his work within the country, he would be a more famous figure there. While native Mexican painters such as Rivera are often credited with creating the first modern works done in true fresco in Mexico and resurrecting the career of the great printmaker Posada, Charlot was the trailblazer who should be credited with both.

¹⁰⁴ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 2.3 The Maternal Side."

¹⁰⁵ ———, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 1.3. Problems and Presentation."

¹⁰⁶ Brenner was a noted historian, art critic, journalist, and editor. Two of her books, *Idols Behind Altars* (1929) and *The Wind that Swept Mexico: The History of the Mexican Revolution 1910-1942* (1943) were seminal books that continue to be studied for their distinctive interpretation of syncretism in Mexican art and the political circumstances that surround the Revolution and its aftermath.

¹⁰⁷ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 2.4 The Immediate Family."

¹⁰⁸ Klarr, 1.

Charlot's knowledge of both techniques and the history of art made a dramatic impression on the artists he encountered. His *Way of the Cross* prints, presented as a portfolio, were used by the artist as a way in which to introduce himself to new artists and patrons in Mexico City. Charlot donated a set of the prints to the Academy of San Carlos, and they were appreciated by a group of young artists.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, although Mexican muralists such as Rivera and Siqueiros had visited various parts of Europe and had viewed the Italian frescoes, Charlot was often called upon for his expertise and familiarity with the art form. Charlot recalled in late interviews with his son that he had memories of being a young boy and viewing fresco murals in churches and museums.¹¹⁰ As an adolescent and as a young man he looked to great fresco painters like Giotto (c. 1267–1337) and Piero della Francesca (c. 1415–1492) for inspiration.¹¹¹ The mural painter who most influenced Charlot before his departure for Mexico was Maurice Denis (1870–1943). While a majority of Denis's murals were oil compositions, he began to make a fresco work in 1915 at the Chapelle du Prieuré that Charlot knew well.¹¹² Given Charlot's knowledge of fresco, Pablo O'Higgins regretted that Charlot left Mexico. Moreover, O'Higgins recognized a great love for Mexico in Charlot and an ability to create great work.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and the Way of the Cross*. Extended labels. Jean Charlot Collection.

¹¹⁰ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.4.6. Architectural Decoration."

¹¹¹ —, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.4.8. Knowledge and Use of Art."

¹¹² —, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 5.6.1. The Artistic Milieu."

¹¹³ Lester C. Walker, Jr. *Jean Charlot: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints: An Exhibition organized by the Georgia Museum of Art, October 31 to December 5, 1976 Georgia Museum of Art Bulletin*, ed. Ethel Moore 2 (Fall) (Athens: The University of Georgia, 1976): 14.

O'Higgins and Charlot maintained a friendship and corresponded occasionally over the years. O'Higgins visited the Charlot Family in Hawai'i in 1952.

From 1922 to 1924, Charlot finished his own murals and worked as an assistant. His first fresco *Massacre in the Main Temple* was created at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (also known as the National Preparatory School) from 1922 to 1923 (fig. 6).¹¹⁴ Charlot later wrote about frescoes, “But I don’t believe that fresco is a very delicate affair. I think that if you nurse your mortar through the first days of drying out, it becomes very quickly tough. One of the toughest mediums. And I think that there is a little bit of affectation when you read the books about fresco painting—about people saying that they cannot paint fresco in such and such place.”¹¹⁵ For Charlot, fresco was a tough and sturdy medium that did not necessitate the care applied to it by many artists. While Charlot painted a fresco at the National Preparatory School, Rivera’s first mural in Mexico, *Creation*, 1922–23, was made with encaustic. *Creation*, painted nearby *Massacre in the Main Temple*, was Rivera’s last mural in encaustic, and moving forward he embraced the fresco technique.¹¹⁶ Rivera is the best-known artist to emerge from the Mexican mural movement and is certainly the most recognized of the muralists in the United States. The proximity in which Charlot worked to Rivera is significant, considering Charlot’s many murals in the United States are far less known.

In describing the power of murals, Charlot wrote,

Mural painting presupposes in its make a certain amount of selflessness. The painted wall is only a fragment of an architectural complex. Communication remains in its essence, and the message must be stated in terms clear to the man in the street, the devout in his church, or the unionized worker in the meeting hall. By definition a mural is not intended to cater to a specialized art lover. Walls are

¹¹⁴ Additionally, there are several smaller fresco panels adjacent to the large *Massacre in the Main Temple*. The other panels are: *Eagle and Serpent, Mexico’s National Emblem*; *St. Christopher*; *Cuauhtémoc, Last of the Mexican Emperors*; and *Shield of the National University of Mexico, with Eagle and Condor*.

¹¹⁵ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹¹⁶ Other artists who created murals at the National Preparatory school include Fernando Leal (1896–1964) and Orozco.

not a proper surface for a naked display of self, a dialogue between the id and the ego.¹¹⁷

Charlot was not shy about expressing his reverence for the art of mural-making. Despite all of the artistic techniques he explored, he always identified himself first and foremost as a muralist. He possessed a great understanding of the history of mural-making and both its pre-Columbian and European precedents. *Massacre in the Main Temple* was in part influenced by three paintings produced by Italian painter Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) that collectively represent the *Battle of San Romano*, c. 1435-40.¹¹⁸ While in this case Charlot derived influence from the subject matter and perspective of Uccello's work, many of the muralists studied Italian painting, in particular the frescoes created during the Italian Renaissance, and found inspiration from these historic artists. The actual battle which inspired the paintings by Uccello occurred in 1432 and consisted of a fight between forces from Siena and Florence. Like the *Battle of San Romano*, Charlot's *Massacre in the Main Temple* presents a clash between two robust military forces. In the case of *Massacre in the Main Temple* the two warring factions are the Aztecs and the Spanish Conquistadors. Bold and long orange lines representing swords guide the viewer's eyes across the composition. Charlot faced optical and physical challenges with this project as the mural was positioned on a wall along a grand staircase. While the overall composition presents a high concentration of figures and expresses the dizzying confusion occurring among the participants of the battle, singular components are a weeping man, a prominent horse, the armor of the Spanish, and an indigenous leader with

¹¹⁷ Jean Charlot, foreword to *The Painted Walls of Mexico*, by Emily Edwards, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), ix.

¹¹⁸ Walker, 14.

an elaborate headdress. In the lower right corner of the composition, Charlot painted a small portrait of himself and a few portraits of friends.

Considering that Charlot arrived in Mexico City at a moment of nationalistic fervor as the country sought to repair itself, it is impressive that as a foreigner he was able to obtain such a prominent mural commission from the government. As the mural movement gained popularity, other foreigners, in particular Americans, were successful in obtaining mural commissions. O'Higgins was the first American muralist to create his own mural in Mexico in 1929 in the northern state of Durango. Howard Cook (1907–1980), who traveled to Mexico on a Guggenheim Fellowship, painted his first fresco mural in Taxco, *Fiesta-Torito*, at the Hotel Taxqueño in 1933.¹¹⁹ Reuben Kadish (1913–1992) and Philip Goldstein (later Philip Guston, 1913–1980) worked on a mural in 1935 for the Museo Regional Michoacano, Morelia; the mural was entitled *The Struggle Against War and Fascism*.¹²⁰ During the same year, Kadish and Goldstein painted a mural, *Progress of Life*, in Duarte, California for the City of Hope Foundation (now City of Hope Medical Center). On both sides of the border, Kadish and Goldstein demonstrated their response to Mexican muralism and the influence of Siqueiros on their work.

Charlot contributed to the murals for the Ministry of Education, but found himself at odds with Rivera. Charlot created *Dance of the Ribbons*, 1923, which celebrated an

¹¹⁹ Dean Porter, *Taos Artists and their Patrons, 1898–1950* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 198.

¹²⁰ Oles, *South of the Border*, 235.

indigenous custom (fig. 7).¹²¹ Similar to his *Massacre in the Main Temple*, his mural *Dance of the Ribbons* has prominent long angular lines that run along an extensive part of the composition, but in this case, the lines represent ribbons as opposed to swords. In this work, masked dancers hold the ribbons and move around a large pole from which they emanate.¹²² In 1924, Rivera destroyed Charlot's work at the site because it did not fit with Rivera's vision for the Ministry of Education and eventually repainted the wall where Charlot had painted the work with his own mural.¹²³ Rivera was already the better-known painter and garnered more respect than Charlot, so he was able to manipulate the Ministry of Education initiative, which he led, while Charlot was for the most part assigned the role of assistant on the project. Charlot's ill-fated work at the Ministry of Education was his last large-scale public art project in Mexico. Although Rivera was critical of Charlot's work, the Frenchman forever embraced the Mexican mural movement and asserted that artists "in Barcelona, Milan, or Paris could afford to sit at café tables and swap aesthetic theories heatedly or gleefully, at leisure. For us the making of art meant fresco murals, climbing scaffolds each morning to do a journeyman's work. Painter and mason sat side by side on the same plank, each busy with the tools of his trade, and they received the same pay."¹²⁴ Though his relationship with Rivera may have

¹²¹ *Dance of the Ribbons* was accompanied by two other Charlot panels at the Ministry of Education building, *Burden Bearers* and *Women Washing*, both created from May to August of 1923. Charlot made a smaller work, *Nine Shields* at the Ministry from September to October of 1923.

¹²² This pole is a direct reference to the maypoles that were made popular at European folk festivals.

¹²³ Though Rivera is heralded as a dynamic artist, he had a reputation for occasionally being cruel. When Vasconcelos and Rivera fell on bad terms, Rivera lampooned him in his Ministry of Education murals by representing Vasconcelos riding a white elephant. Considering that Vasconcelos, as the Minister of Education, had helped Rivera receive the commission, and he worked in the Ministry of Education building, the representation seemed particularly unfriendly.

¹²⁴ Charlot, foreword to José Clemente Orozco, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and unpublished writings, 1925–1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 10.

been unnecessarily complex due to the destruction of his mural, he was quite close with Orozco.

Though *Massacre in the Main Temple* and the controversy surrounding his work at the Ministry of Education dominated the story of Charlot's mural career in Mexico, he did create one more work, a small public fresco, *Shield of the National University of Mexico, with Eagle and Condor*, in February of 1924 at the Biblioteca Pan-Americana in Mexico City. Beyond Charlot's involvement with mural-making in Mexico, he became an important figure among the Estridentistas and continued to write poetry. The poet Manuel Maples Arce (1898–1981) was considered to be the leader of Estridentismo, a literary group informed by visual art movements such as Dadaism and Futurism that remained active from approximately 1921–1927. Charlot and fellow muralist Fernando Leal (1896–1964) met regularly with the Estridentistas at Café Europa, where Charlot also exhibited his works.¹²⁵ Although later in his life he would downplay his significant role within the group, many of the other participants cited his influence as important.¹²⁶ The Estridentistas called upon Mexican artists to form an art society that was informed by European art trends and that embraced the growing sense of internationalism within twentieth-century art. Due to his extensive time in Europe and his familiarity with Dadaism and Futurism, Charlot made an ideal consultant to the group whose members were eager for access to the most avant-garde ideologies of the day.

¹²⁵ Klarr, 36.

¹²⁶ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work by John Charlot, 1.2 Interviews." For more information on Charlot and this significant literary movement, see Stefan Baciú, *Jean Charlot: Estridentista Silencioso*, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Editorial "El Café de Nadie," 1982).

“November 11, 1927. Colonial 9pm Orozco leaves.”¹²⁷ This brief entry was written by Charlot in his diary. Here, he referred to Orozco’s departure for New York City. From 1922 until his death, Charlot kept a diary in which he recorded notes on the events of each day in French shorthand.¹²⁸ This notation in Charlot’s diary relates to a series of letters that the two men exchanged from December 1927 and October 1928. The correspondence between the two men, which was later published by Charlot in association with the University of Texas Press, reveals a genuine affection between the two and an interest in helping one another succeed in their artistic careers.¹²⁹ At the time of Orozco’s departure for New York, he lived with this family in Coyoacán, the same area as Charlot and his mother. Rather dramatically, Charlot was the only one who bid his dear friend Orozco goodbye at the train station when he left for New York City.

In 1928, with the assistance of writer and art promoter Alma Reed (1889–1966), Orozco organized two exhibitions for Charlot in New York in 1929. While one of the exhibitions was a group show, the other was a solo exhibition at the New York Architectural League.¹³⁰ Orozco wrote Charlot and reminded him that he was welcome to use his studio in Coyoacán in his absence, asked him to retrieve photographs of his work from Tina Modotti, and in a post script he informed Charlot that George Biddle (1885–

¹²⁷ José Clemente Orozco, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925-1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 9.

¹²⁸ While mostly written in French, Charlot spoke many languages and the pages of his diary incorporated this knowledge.

¹²⁹ José Clemente Orozco, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925-1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

¹³⁰ Charlot, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings (1925–1929)* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 73.

1973) “created a big portrait of me in which I look like Lincoln.”¹³¹ As Orozco struggled to establish himself in New York, he kept in touch with Charlot.

Of all the people, specifically the artists whom Charlot met in Mexico, it was his encounter with the young American artist Dorothy Day that would have the strongest impact on his life, as she would eventually become his wife. Day was born on December 13, 1909 in Bingham City, Utah. While she was still a young girl, her family relocated to Los Angeles. Day graduated from Fairfax High School in 1927. She disliked how common her first name was, so after speaking with a numerologist who suggested that she use the name “Zohmah,” she changed her given name.¹³² In describing Mexico, Zohmah wrote “Here they bow to the earth, handle it lovingly and hold to it furiously. It is more important than progress and ideas. Corn must be grown, clay shaped, and stones cut into gods. The earth is food, art, and the bed that comforts in sleep and death.”¹³³ Here, Zohmah acknowledges a spiritual connection to the land and its resources. Charlot and Zohmah were together for eight years before marrying, eventually holding a modest ceremony in San Francisco, California. Zohmah continued to support Charlot throughout his life and was a strong advocate and promoter of his legacy after he died. She saved his letters and drawings, and organized his papers. In order to let him focus on his work, she often kept up with his correspondence. The plethora of information available in the Jean

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Zohmah Charlot, *Mexican Memories*, 1931, 2, fn.1.

¹³³ Ibid, 1.

Charlot Collection at the University of Hawai‘i should in part be credited to the archivist tendencies of Zohmah Day Charlot.¹³⁴

Charlot’s thirst for knowledge led him to immerse himself in a variety of literary and art movements and also directed him to study the vast history of Mexican art. His exposure to pre-Columbian art was enhanced by his work for the Carnegie Institution from 1926 to 1928. During this time he was present at the excavation of the Temple of Warriors at Chichén Itzá in the state of Yucatán.¹³⁵ This experience furthered his already well-developed curiosity about the pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico and afforded the young artist an opportunity to make an income. Although he arrived on-site as a draughtsman, by the end of his assignment he was one of three co-authors on the final report.¹³⁶ The scholar most associated with the reports was the illustrious archaeologist Dr. Sylvanus Griswold Morley, although Earl H. Morris was also a part of the study team. Artist Lowell Houser (1902–1971) who worked under Charlot on the project described the process: “We copied what Mayan murals were found in the ruins and then a great many were drawings and sculpture. Many times the sculpture was so eroded that actually a photograph didn’t show it very well and we had to sort of search out with our hands and then make a drawing.”¹³⁷ In addition to his official contributions to the project, Charlot also created other works that were inspired by his experiences in the area.

¹³⁴ Many of the Mexican modernists had wives that facilitated the success of their artist husband’s careers while they were alive and also following their death. Other examples are Angelica Siqueiros (wife of David Alfaro Siqueiros) and Brigita Anguiano (wife of Raúl Anguiano).

¹³⁵ The height of Chichén Itzá as a political and cultural power was from approximately 750 to 1000 AD. The Temple of the Warriors is an elaborate building with sculptured feathered serpents that occupy either side of the entrance. The interior of the Temple was decorated with frescoes that present the Toltec conquest of the Yucatán region.

¹³⁶ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 41, no.1 (June 2006): 63.

¹³⁷ Oral history interview with Lowell Houser, 1964 July 31, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In his lithograph, *The High Comb, Yucatán*, 1935 (fig. 8), Charlot demonstrates the influence of his time at Chichén Itzá and the Yucatán region of Mexico. During his stay at Chichén Itzá, Charlot was not only stimulated by the ancient culture, but also by the contemporary indigenous Maya communities of the Yucatec region. Though this particular piece was created several years after Charlot's extended time in the region, it reflects Charlot's typical way of working in which he would record certain images and ideas and repeat them over the course of many years. In describing *The High Comb, Yucatán*, Charlot stated that the young girl was about twelve years old; around the age that he believed local girls began to prepare to find their spouses.¹³⁸ The long line that flows from the young girl's body and up to the hair comb demonstrates the artist's ability to use few lines to create complete compositions. Charlot stressed the importance of simple, bold lines, and a rejection of ornate detail. When Charlot arrived in Mexico in 1921, he encountered a group of artists who were eager to revisit Mexican culture and identity and celebrate daily aspects of Mexican life that had not been recognized previously to any great extent. This work reflects that sensibility. Charlot's involvement with the Carnegie Institution project was both indicative of his great connection to these important Mexican artists who worked at a time in which their national culture was being re-examined and an example of Charlot's engagement with scholarly activities. His participation further demonstrates his place among a significant community of artists active in Mexico in the 1920s who professed a deep interest in the cultural preservation of Mexico.

¹³⁸ Morse, 156.

While Charlot made several strong contributions to scholarship, his most important role in the promotion of Mexican art and the development of the history of art was his rediscovery of the printmaker José Guadalupe Posada. Charlot's interest in Posada, a popular artist who created art for the masses and addressed political issues of the day, stirred the interest of the other muralists active in Mexico. Posada created tens of thousands of prints for the penny press. His works were made for the consumption of the masses and often dealt with culturally significant images, current events, or subliminal political messages. The cultural and political content of the prints and their creation for the masses appealed to many Mexican modern artists. But, when Posada died in 1913, he remained largely unknown to most of Mexico City and certainly underappreciated by the leading art critics and collectors of the day. Charlot encountered Posada's work in broadsheets sold in flea markets and as illustrations in popular books. These experiences allowed him to resurrect knowledge of Posada and to share the printmaker's work with the avant-garde circle of artist friends with whom he surrounded himself in Mexico City. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the story of modern Mexican art without Posada.

The better-known muralists benefited from Charlot's recognition of Posada's work. Both Rivera and Orozco praised Posada and owed their knowledge of his art to Charlot. In his mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park*, 1948, Rivera depicted himself as a child holding hands with Calavera Catrina, one of Posada's most iconic representations. Catrina was a female dandy represented as a skeleton with a fancy hat that was meant to evoke the upper class women who benefited from the reign of Porfirio Díaz. Posada often used skeletons to depict the living in terms of the dead. On the other side of Catrina is a portrait of Posada. Here Rivera honors the printmaker by

placing him at a position of prominence, near the center of the composition, in a mural with a dizzying array of figures. Though Mexico proved to be a source of great artistic inspiration for Charlot and he was able to make many personal and professional contacts in the country that would last for a lifetime, his ability to receive major commissions and to participate in important exhibitions was not tremendously successful. Given the fact that *Massacre in the Main Temple* was the artist's only large-scale mural in Mexico, he hoped that the United States might provide more opportunity, and specifically financial security.

B. Shifting Roles: New Professional Directions for Charlot

Charlot once stated, "Yes, of course, one thinks of the pay check. But I do think then even if I was a millionaire, which I am not, I would go on teaching. I like very much to see the succeeding generations and it makes me feel a little settled to see their successive conclusions."¹³⁹ Charlot expressed a great love for teaching. He painted and did some teaching at the Open Air School in Coyoacán; however, in the United States, teaching positions became an important part of his life and took his career in a new professional direction. After moving to New York in 1929, Charlot became not only increasingly engaged with teaching, but also with his artistic passion, mural-making. Moving to the United States provided him with an opportunity to make murals, while in Mexico his prospects to create work in his favorite medium had dwindled.

In the United States, Charlot received several significant teaching appointments and should be credited for teaching generations of students about fresco painting and the

¹³⁹ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

traditions of the Mexican muralists. Charlot's first mural project in the United States was overseeing a five-hundred-square-foot mural entitled *The Art Contribution to Civilization of All Nations and Countries*, 1934, for the Strauben-Muller Textile High School (now the Bayard Rustin High School for the Humanities) in New York.¹⁴⁰ The mural was realized in the entrance foyer of the school and was created by students. The project had already begun when Charlot arrived, but he guided the work to completion. To accompany his supervising role, Charlot painted his own mural at Strauben-Muller Textile High School, *Head, Crowned with Laurels*, a fresco begun in August of 1934 and completed in 1935 (fig. 9). The classical composition includes a central female figure seated with a crown of laurels. Surrounding the central figure are both seated and standing figures, the majority of which are women. For many years it was believed that the mural was destroyed, when in fact, it remains on the wall of the school.¹⁴¹ Shortly after it was completed, the mural was painted over, but it was completely restored in 1995.

Charlot accepted brief teaching assignments at diverse institutions such as the Chouinard Art School (1938), Arts Students League (1938), Columbia University (1938), University of Iowa (1939), College of Notre Dame (now University in 1939), Smith College (1944), and Arizona State University (1951). He deemed the series of lectures on Mexican art that he conducted at Yale University to be his "most glorious" teaching assignment.¹⁴² The prestige of Yale University and its dedication to employing

¹⁴⁰ The address of the school is 351 West 18th Street, New York City.

¹⁴¹ The Arts Commission of the City of New York to John Charlot, 18 June 1990, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁴² Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

internationally-renowned artists contributed to Charlot's sentiments. In addition to the academic institutions where he taught, he also engaged students at nontraditional places such as Disney Studios in Los Angeles where he gave eight illustrated lectures in 1938 to animators and draftsmen.¹⁴³

One of Charlot's most documented teaching appointments was the time that he spent at the University of Georgia in Athens, where from 1942 to 1944 he created three murals, one at a local post office and two at the university. The mural at the McDonough Post Office was entitled *Cotton Gin* and was created from January 14 to February 17, 1942 (fig. 10). The mural was officially unveiled after its installation on May 12, 1942. This particular mural was a WPA-sponsored project. In describing the government-sponsored mural, Charlot wrote,

I had brushed murals for a government once before, but Mexican officials in the 1920s still disported a revolution-bred informality. In contrast, notwithstanding the genuine affability of its dispensers, Washington intricacy bred unease. The contract entered into that day referred to "The Artist" with quote, unquote and a capital A, a fancy dress for a fact long taken for granted, while the future mural was tagged "WAlpb3661" which made it all the harder to envision.¹⁴⁴

Here, Charlot reveals the difference he felt between government-sponsored murals in Mexico and the United States. Furthermore, many post offices were decorated by American painters during the 1930s and 1940s. The particular location of this mural and its government sponsorship places Charlot's work within direct context of a major movement of modern art in the United States that was directly inspired by Mexican

¹⁴³Reuel Denney, "A Tale of Two Studios: Artist Jean Charlot in Walt Disney's Atelier," *Feast of Strangers: Selected Prose and Poetry of Reuel Denney*, ed. Tony Quagliano (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger, 1999), 141.

¹⁴⁴Jean Charlot, "First Mural: McDonough Post Office," *Charlot Murals in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1945), 42.

muralism. Here, with the McDonough Post Office mural, Charlot participated in the American branch of the mural movement firmly rooted in Mexico.

Charlot produced two murals on the campus of the University of Georgia, Athens: *Visual Arts, Drama, Music*, painted from April 20 to May 1, 1942 on the Fine Arts Building (fig. 11) and *Time Discloseth All Things, Cortez Lands in Mexico, and Paratroopers Land in Sicily*, produced from January 3 to February 29, 1944 in the corridor of the Journalism Building (fig. 12-13). *Time Discloseth All Things, Cortez Lands in Mexico, and Paratroopers Land in Sicily* marks the artist's only literal representation in the United States of Mexican colonialism. He portrays Hernán Cortés on a big white horse, dramatically pointing his finger in the air as if to tell the two indigenous women who stand by his side, graciously presenting him with goods, to abandon their lands. As is typical with these types of illustrations of colonialism in Mexican mural art, the Spanish and the indigenous sectors of society are presented as polar opposites, without any reference to the more nuanced relationships between the Spanish colonizers and the indigenous communities during the colonial period. While the mural for the Journalism Building represents the colonial past, it also refers to current events in its depiction of paratroopers landing in Italy. With World War II raging abroad, the journalism students at the University of Georgia were acutely aware of recent events. Charlot dealt with vastly different imagery in his Georgia work, ranging from allegorical figures, military operations, and Spanish colonialism, to a local cotton gin, which he had

visited for inspiration. Moreover, in his mural for the post office, Charlot portrayed African American workers for the first time.¹⁴⁵

One of the most influential and creative environments experienced by Charlot was Black Mountain College, an experimental school in North Carolina that operated from 1933 to 1956. Black Mountain was not accredited and did not give degrees but some of the most important artists of the twentieth century either studied or taught there, including John Cage (1912–1992), Merce Cunningham (1919–2009), Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), Kenneth Noland (1924–2010), and Josef Albers (1888–1976). Charlot’s diary entries from about August 31 to September 10 of 1943 reveal that when he was at Black Mountain College for a brief visit, he was able to interact with Josef and Anni Albers. He responded with enthusiasm to Anni’s textiles, and he and Josef juried a show together. Charlot and Albers spoke about composition, painting, and Mexico. Albers collected pre-Columbian objects and photographs of Mexico.¹⁴⁶

After a considerable amount of teaching, Charlot became eligible for administrative work as well. In 1947, he received both a teaching and an administrative position when he was named Director of the Colorado Springs Fine Art School.¹⁴⁷ Correspondence between Charlot and Colorado Springs Fine Art School reveals great excitement on the part of the institution to have such an artist of international reputation

¹⁴⁵ A portrait of an African American laborer struck a powerful chord with Charlot, and in 1977 he repeated his portrait of the figure in a serigraph.

¹⁴⁶ Xerox copy of a transcribed document from the Black Mountain diary, 1943. The Jean Charlot Collection.

¹⁴⁷ According to a letter from Percy Hagerman (President) to “To Whom It May Concern” dated June 5, 1948, Charlot’s yearly salary for the position was \$6,200 dollars.

assume the directorship.¹⁴⁸ The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center had welcomed other artists of note before. The previous director of the school was Boardman Robinson (1876-1952), who needed to retire due to his failing health. A lesser known artist today, Robinson was born in Canada and became a successful illustrator in New York and taught for several years at the Art Students League. One of his many students who would go on to extraordinary successes was the painter Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975).

In Colorado Springs, Charlot taught painting and fresco technique.¹⁴⁹ Even before he officially started, Charlot contributed to a discussion on the state of art education at a conference entitled *Education in the Arts—Theory and Practice*.¹⁵⁰ The conference was an annual event co-organized by the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and Colorado College. By teaching at so many universities in the United States, Charlot was able to play a role in the formation of arts education in the country, as well as in the spread of knowledge about Mexican culture and identity. Many have credited Charlot for his tremendous contributions to art education, including Lester C. Walker who wrote, “From the 1930s through the 1960s, he helped form the great period of expansion and development of the concept of training in art as an integral part of American higher education.”¹⁵¹ Due to Charlot’s first-hand experience with Mexican muralism, he

¹⁴⁸ Colorado Springs Fine Art Center to Jean Charlot, 5 August 1947, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Archives, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

¹⁴⁹ Class Schedules. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Archives.

An old schedule finds Charlot teaching advanced painting on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings (from 9am to 12pm), a mural class on Monday afternoons (from 1:30 to 4:30pm), and a seminar class on Friday afternoons (from 2 to 4pm), in which all the faculty and students were required to attend. On Tuesday evenings, Charlot taught a life drawing class from 7:30 to 9:30pm. Other regarded artists were at the school including Edgar Britton (1901–1982); his teaching assignments included beginning painting and still-life classes.

¹⁵⁰ Transcript of Jean Charlot’s speech. Fine Arts Conference. Colorado Springs, Colorado. August 1, 1947. 1-9. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Archives.

¹⁵¹ Walker, 9.

participated in constructing a body of knowledge about the Mexican mural movement among generations of students in the United States.

While Charlot was based in Colorado Springs, Mexico was not far from his artistic inspiration. His painting *Mexican Kitchen*, 1948 was created while the artist was working at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (fig. 14). It presents a muted color palette with a small window in the upper right part of the composition offering a mild light source, a convention that is repeated in Charlot's representations of interior spaces such as kitchens and some of his representations of Joseph's carpenter shop. Furthermore, the dark ambience of the painting, lit by a single light source from a window in the right-hand corner, evokes traditional Baroque compositions. The juxtaposition of light and dark areas of the canvas lends a sense of drama. In the lower right portion of the canvas, a woman leans over a *metate* and grinds corn. A *rebozo*, a traditional shawl, wraps around the woman's shoulders and holds the woman's baby close to her back. The image of a woman wearing a *rebozo* accompanied by her child was a common iconographic element throughout Charlot's work.

One of Charlot's favorite poems, originally written in Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs), reveals the significance of his enduring interest in portraying kitchen scenes and tortilla-making.

Mother dear, when I die
Bury me under the beaten earth of the kitchen
And when you do the tortillas
And thinking of me, you cry—
If somebody asks you, 'Why do you cry?'
Answer, 'The wood that I put in the fire is green,
And it is the smoke that chokes me.'¹⁵²

¹⁵² *Introducción, Escritos sobre Arte Mexicano*, edited by Peter Morse and John Charlot.
<http://www.jeancharlot.org/writings/escritos/charlotescritos.html>

This poem demonstrates Charlot's connection to the historic Aztec culture and also a sweet, personal relationship to motherhood. Mothers were frequently portrayed in the various media that Charlot worked in and his own relationship with his mother was influential to his art. Charlot's repeated depiction of mothers will be discussed further in Chapter V, alongside a discussion of Ramos Martínez's shared interest in this particular subject matter. The connection to the ancient poem reinforces Charlot's own interest in writing poetry and his appreciation for the works of others. Furthermore, *Mexican Kitchen* reveals the artist's own distinctive style. Though many artists were drawn to portray the indigenous populations of Mexico, Charlot's representations are recognizable for their simultaneous presentation of angular and rounded forms.

Beyond creating work inspired by Mexico and teaching the fresco technique, Charlot finished a mural in the home that his family rented while living in Colorado Springs. The mural was discovered when a local librarian, Helen Michelson, donated her property to the city of Colorado Springs. Michelson died in December of 2003 and bequeathed three houses to the city of Colorado Springs. Inside one of the homes was a small fresco mural by Charlot, *Tortillera*, 1948.¹⁵³

The composition returns to a familiar theme for the artist in that it depicts a woman making tortillas. Charlot likely made this mural as a teaching tool for his fresco classes, as it was not as finished as his other murals. Moreover, the work was created in his home, so it was not available for public viewing. In Colorado, this teaching fresco was one of the only opportunities for Charlot to explore the medium he truly loved.

¹⁵³ Bill Vogrin, "City's new fresco a classic Charlot," *The Gazette* Thursday December 23, 2004.

During his time in Colorado Springs, Charlot was not offered walls to realize murals, and for an artist who identified himself most as a muralist this would not do.

Although mural opportunities were not plentiful for Charlot in Colorado Springs, he did have some professional opportunities beyond teaching. Charlot's work *Mexican Kitchen* was also represented in the exhibition *Tenth Annual Artists West of the Mississippi* held at Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center from February 25 to April 11 of that year.¹⁵⁴ He was joined by artists based in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Wyoming, California, Washington, Iowa, Missouri, Texas, Kansas, and Arizona. Other well-known artists who participated in the exhibition were New Mexico-based artists Howard Cook (1901–1980), Andrew Dasburg (1887–1979), Randall Davey (1887–1964), and Werner Drewes (1899–1985) from Missouri.

In his diary, Charlot recorded on May 11, 1949, “make linocut for a catalogue Nix show.”¹⁵⁵ The notation referred to an upcoming exhibition in Colorado Springs at the George Nix Gallery, which Charlot identified as the only gallery in town. The outline of the female figure's face and the decorative lines on either side of her profile are thick and heavy, in contrast to the artist's more typical style and technique (fig. 15). In reviewing this linocut many years later, Charlot commented that he must have used a bad knife when carving the linoleum block used to make this print.¹⁵⁶

Charlot taught at the University of Hawai'i from 1949 to 1966.¹⁵⁷ He began his career at the institution as a Professor of Art. He befriended many of his colleagues,

¹⁵⁴ *Tenth Annual Artists West of the Mississippi Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center*. February 25-April 11, 1948. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁵⁵ Morse, 292.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Though Charlot would settle in Hawai'i in 1949, he would return to the continental United States for various projects. The late works that he did in both Hawai'i and in the continental United States are under-recognized.

several of whom have been referenced in this study, including Claude Horan and Juliette May Fraser. At first, his connection with his art students was more elusive. When Charlot joined the faculty of the University of Hawai‘i, his students were more interested in abstraction, specifically the Abstract Expressionist artists active in New York. They did not see an immediate significance in the work of Charlot, with his emphasis on narrative art and figural representations. So, Charlot began teaching more history of art courses and gradually developed relationships with his students through his vast knowledge of the trajectory of art history and his distinctive experience and approach to it.

In the summer of 1950, after his first year in Hawai‘i, Charlot accepted an invitation from his old friend, artist Everett Gee Jackson, to work as a visiting professor at San Diego State College (now San Diego State University). Referred to as one of the San Diego Moderns, Jackson developed a reputation in Southern California, but for the most part he escaped larger recognition. During this time, Charlot also taught a class at the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego (now The San Diego Museum of Art). The publicity material for the class stated, “Mr. Charlot, internationally famous painter, lithographer and art writer, will give a 5-week’s general painting course at the Summer Art Institute, concurrently with his program at San Diego State College. Mr. Charlot will divide his attention between advanced students, and those less experienced, and should be able to help with problems of large-scale composition.”¹⁵⁸

While Charlot’s time in San Diego in 1950 was formally a part of a teaching program, Charlot was often informally influencing others and providing arts education.

¹⁵⁸ *Paint in San Diego with Jean Charlot and George B. Post*. 1950 Summer Art Institute of the Fine Arts Society at the Fine Arts Gallery, Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Registration form. The San Diego Museum of Art Archives.

Jackson brought Charlot to San Diego after his own first-hand experience with the artist.

Charlot provided Jackson with important education opportunities. In his *Burros and*

Paintbrushes: A Mexican Adventure, Jackson recounts an early interaction with Charlot:

By that time Anita Brenner had introduced us to the artist Jean Charlot, who was a member of the Mexican group of mural painters. Whenever Charlot would drop by to see us, he would go immediately to our long center room to see what we had been painting. We noticed that he would always look carefully at Lowelito's [Lowell Houser, 1903–1971] work and also at my work, but that he would pass by the work of the Impressionist as though it simply were not on the walls. Since he apparently had not seen it, although it was in plain view, he would never make any comments about it.

At that time, I think my own painting was also quite impressionistic in style, since I looked at what I painted and tried to record what I believed I was seeing, and since by then I had about ceased 'recognizing the visual subject before me. Perhaps Charlot always looked at my work because I was a friend of Lowelito's, or perhaps because I had such a pretty wife. But Charlot's attitude toward that Impressionist's work made me wonder about the kind of painting I was doing. And when one wonders or questions what he is doing, his faith in his activity is weakened. He may then be very vulnerable to outside influences.

Since those early days, I have continued to be interested in the fact that groups of artists shift from one style to another quite rapidly, often following some leader as though they were a flock of sheep, and showing more concern for conformity than for the creation of visual quality using their own imaginations. Jean Charlot's attitude toward the painting of that Impressionist may throw some light on the way those shifts come about. Lowelito and I regarded Charlot with unfaltering respect, so we watched his responses very carefully. We felt that he just might indicate the right direction to go forward.¹⁵⁹

Here, Jackson remembers Charlot as not openly critical, but he carefully points out that by omitting certain works completely from discussion, Charlot let his reactions to those works be known. As an artist who still clung, if loosely, to Impressionism, Jackson clearly noted Charlot's lack of interest in the style and it was a motivation for him to embrace more deeply the tenets of modernism and to simplify his form, color, and line.

¹⁵⁹Everett Gee Jackson, *Burros and Paintbrushes* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1985), 115-116.

As a result of growing up in the tiny town of Mexia, Texas, Jackson had been intrigued by Mexico for a number of years. He and his wife Eileen lived in Chapala before they relocated to Mexico City. In Coyoacán they met Brenner, Orozco, and Charlot. Although Jackson admired the work of the muralists, he and his wife shied away from the parties with the avant-garde artists living in Mexico City.¹⁶⁰

After being in San Diego during the summer of 1950, Charlot returned to the southwest portion of the United States during the summer of 1951 for a teaching and mural opportunity in Arizona. With the exception of his Fiji project and the many works he completed on the islands of Hawai‘i, the majority of Charlot’s mural production was realized on the continental United States. Most of these projects occurred during the summer, when Charlot was on a break from his teaching duties at the University of Hawai‘i. One of these projects was for Arizona State University in 1951. The Arizona project offered Charlot an opportunity to represent Native Americans (indigenous groups of the United States) for the first time.

Charlot was invited to Arizona State by the artist Paula R. Kloster. Charlot and Kloster met at the Art Students League in New York. As a result of her familiarity with Charlot, Kloster asked him to teach a mural painting class at Arizona State College (now Arizona State University) in Tempe, Arizona and expressed her hopes that he might be able to paint a mural in one of the campus’s new buildings.¹⁶¹ At the time that Charlot was invited to the campus, Arizona State had undertaken a massive building program, which left Charlot with an opportunity to produce a mural in a newly completed

¹⁶⁰ Jerry Williamson, *Eileen: The Story of Eileen Jackson as told by her daughter* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society in association with Kales Press, 2000), 46.

¹⁶¹ Paula R. Kloster to Jean Charlot, 6 January 1950, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

structure. Twenty-six students helped Charlot realize the Hopi Dance mural, and they conducted a variety of tasks from mixing paints, outlining the cartoon on the wall itself, and doing some minimal painting on the plaster.¹⁶² Charlot was popular on campus and some poems were written about him by students.¹⁶³

The building where Charlot produced his mural, *Man's Wisdom Subdues the Aggressive Forces of Nature*, was completed in March of 1950, and therefore, Charlot's mural production was to be undertaken in front of an admiring public.¹⁶⁴ It was Kloster who initially urged Charlot to think about painting a mural about either early or contemporary Native American culture.¹⁶⁵ Charlot's appointment with Arizona State was from June 4 to August 11, 1951.¹⁶⁶ He hoped that the creation of this mural just outside of Phoenix would inspire future mural production in Arizona.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² *The Arizona Statesman* X, no.4 (Summer 1951):2.

¹⁶³ *The Dithyramb*, 2. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

This is an example of one of the poems, "A Chant to an Artist, Jean Charlot" by a student named E. Anderson:

"Now Charlot goes far away, a new fresco to lay,
In Hawaiian Islands on Waikiki Bay,
Someday, we hope he may return to stay,
And all the students will grasp his hand
The Sun Devils will meet him with their band,

Hail Charlot; Hail great master of art,
The expert artist with a great big heart,
Charlot's talent is very plain,
His painting never give us a pain,
They never fade even in the rain,
He slings the brush very fast,
The hours, minutes march very fast,
This is the story of Charlot that has been cast."

¹⁶⁴ Paula R. Kloster to Jean Charlot, November 27, 1950, Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Notice of Appointment, Arizona State College, Tempe, Arizona, December 18, 1950. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i. He was compensated with \$2,700 for teaching and for the execution of the 900 square foot mural.

¹⁶⁷ Undated/Unpaginated document by Charlot describing the mural. Mural Folder #19. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Charlot's *Man's Wisdom Subdues the Aggressive Forces of Nature* is located in a stairwell and is divided into two distinct triangles as a result of a railing that runs the length of the stairwell (fig. 16). The upper triangle depicts a Hopi Dance in which a snake is calmed by indigenous spiritual powers.¹⁶⁸ Although these works related to the local Native American cultures, they focused on the connection to the natural environment (a frequent subject in his Hawai'i murals) and ceremonial tradition (a common theme in both his Hawai'i and Mexico works). The bright yellow hues that make up the background of the top tier of the mural at Arizona State are not typical of the artist's work. Moreover, in the corner of the bottom-half, the mural fades into a series of purple, red, and yellow, evoking thoughts of a rainbow. The presence of these colors might be a result of the local climate. Charlot worked in Phoenix during the summer, and the warm sun that beats down across the topography might have inspired the yellow hues. The bright rainbow hues suggest the differentiation of colors seen at sunset against the desert landscape.

The lower triangle shows a scientific practice in which venom is extracted from a snake and then used to save human life. This imagery was inspired by real research on the campus of Arizona State University. Dr. H. L. Stahnke, the Chair of the Department of Biological Science, had been recognized for his research on antivenom serum, and Dr. Stahnke's hands were used as a model for the doctor's hands depicted in the mural. His easily identifiable scorpion ring is visible in the portrait.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ These murals are located in the Administration A Building on the campus of Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

¹⁶⁹ *The Arizona Statesman* no.4 (Summer 1951):3.

Charlot's work at universities in the United States was often in conjunction with mural projects. For example, during his stay in South Bend, Indiana, Charlot produced murals at both the University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College. The artist's experiences in Indiana yielded the following murals: *Fresco Class in Action*, 1955 and *Mestrovic's Studio*, 1956 (both of which were originally on view in the student lounge of O'Shaughnessy Hall and are now the basement offices of the Snite Museum on the campus of Notre Dame); *Fourteen Panels Symbolizing the Fine Arts*, 1955; and *The Fire of Creation*, 1956 at O'Laughlin Auditorium and Moreau Hall respectively at St. Mary's College.¹⁷⁰ The sculptor Ivan Mestrovic (1883–1962) was a professor at Notre Dame from 1955 to 1962 and interacted with Charlot during his time on the campus.

Even when Charlot was creating murals outside of the university environment, he often established a learning environment. For Charlot the camaraderie, in addition to the educational opportunity, augmented the significance of murals. He stated, "I think the thrill of fresco is working as a team. I always like to remember the cathedrals of the middle ages where one man would have been incapable of doing the whole thing and yet which stand as a unit, and we think of them as a unit of art. It is the same thing with those large fresco jobs."¹⁷¹ Here, Charlot acknowledged that the creation of a successful mural is a result of teamwork. Charlot's commitment to collaboration and his alignment with the cause of the worker echoed the Socialist impulse that was prevalent among many

¹⁷⁰ *Fresco Class in Action* was created from June 18 to July 15, 1955. The fourteen fresco panels for St. Mary's College were realized from August 5 to 16, 1955. *Mestrovic's Studio*, 1956 was painted from July 9 to July 17, 1956. *Fire of Creation*, 1956 was painted on July 21, 1956.

¹⁷¹ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

artists and activists in the United States, although Charlot did not publicly declare an interest in Socialism.

Charlot received substantial attention for his work, and he was embraced by many art educators. Although respect for his work did not necessarily translate into a considerable number of commercial sales and a plethora of museum exhibitions, news of Charlot's arrival in a community sparked interest among art professionals. For example, a teacher asked if she and four of her students could visit the Benedictine Abbey in Atchison, Kansas where he painted a mural cycle in 1959 and "watch the master as he works."¹⁷² Indeed, the Abbey provided a space for educational opportunities. Brother Mark, who was particularly engaged with the arts, was an assistant to Charlot at the Abbey. Charlot's project offered local clergymen the opportunity to learn about the fresco technique, and specifically they expressed curiosity about the amount of lime that might be used to create the right mixture.¹⁷³ The artist, like most fresco painters, was well aware of the measures that needed to be taken to properly mix the paint pigments with water to apply directly onto the layer of plaster or lime mortar that covered the walls where the mural was to be realized.

C. Charlot and His Peers

Charlot was friends with numerous well-known intellectuals throughout the twentieth century. While many of the people Charlot interacted with were visual artists, Charlot also exchanged correspondence over the years with clergymen, philosophers,

¹⁷² Cuthbert McDonald to Jean Charlot, 31 July 1958, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁷³ Cuthbert McDonald to Jean Charlot, 9 March 1959, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

poets, and journalists. During his career, Charlot often portrayed the likenesses of the people who were close to him. Portraits created by Charlot of his peers include Anita Brenner, Germán List Arzubide, Manuel Martínez Pintao, Tina Modotti, Nahui Olin, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Edward Weston. Charlot later recounted that the artist Henrietta Shore (1880–1963) was disappointed with her physical appearance in Charlot's portrait.¹⁷⁴ Shore spent time in Mexico and was inspired to develop a body of work in response to Mexican culture. She completed a mural for a post office in Santa Cruz, California that portrayed day laborers at work.

As mentioned previously, many American artists made their way to Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century. Weston, along with his companion the Italian-born Modotti, arrived in Mexico in 1923. Weston and Modotti created enduring images of modern Mexico during the 1920s, and both were influential to the most significant Latin American photographer of the twentieth century, the Mexican-born artist Manuel Álvarez Bravo (1902–2002). While in Mexico, Weston continued with the modernist approach he practiced in the United States, often choosing Mexican objects as sources for inspiration—but he also created a series of important portraits of well-known painters active in Mexico such as Rivera, Orozco, and Charlot. Weston embraced these artists and remained in touch with Charlot after they had both left Mexico. Weston also took photographs of Charlot and his wife Zohmah in Point Lobos, California in 1939.

Charlot developed many deep relationships with the assistants who worked for him during his career. His sensitivity to those who helped him realize his murals stemmed from his own experiences as an assistant. Two assistants who were particularly important

¹⁷⁴ Morse, 78.

to Charlot were the mason Paul Hendrickson and the painter Brother James Roberts. All three men united to work together on Charlot's commission in Farmington, Michigan. After the Korean War, Roberts entered the Brothers of Mary (Marianists).¹⁷⁵ He came to Honolulu in 1963 and became the head of the Art Department at Chaminade College, where he designed "stained glass windows, vestments for the Mass and sacred vessels."¹⁷⁶ Roberts painted some of his own murals after working with Charlot and designed the circular chapel for the St. Louis-Chaminade campus.

D. Charlot and Scholarship

In addition to his own artistic production, Charlot proved to be a significant scholar, producing both articles and books on a wide-range of topics including pre-Columbian art and the muralists.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Charlot was a prolific artist, writer, playwright, and illustrator. Some of his more noteworthy achievements were his status as the art editor of the periodical *Mexican Folkways* from 1924 to 1926 and the creativity he employed when he composed plays in several different languages.¹⁷⁸

Due to his personal contact with the muralists in Mexico, Charlot was able to continue to spread the tenets of muralism as well as provide insider information about

¹⁷⁵ Roberts was born on June 15, 1931 in Los Angeles, California.

¹⁷⁶ Xerox of information about "Artist of the Month/Brother James Roberts/April 12 through May 9, 1966" for a one-man show of his paintings at the First Unitarian Church in Honolulu. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁷⁷ An abbreviated list of works by Charlot includes: "Aztec Motifs," *Design* 32, no. 6 (November 1930): 138–139; "Juan Cordero: A Nineteenth-Century Mexican Muralist," *Art Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (December 1946): 248–265; "Diego Rivera in Italy," *Magazine of Art* 46, no. 1 (January 1953), 3–10; "Orozco and Siqueiros at The Academy of San Carlos," *College Art Journal* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1951): 355–369; *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot* (Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1972); "José Guadalupe Posada and His Successors" in *Posada's Mexico*, ed. Ron Tyler (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress in Cooperation with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1979), 29–57.

For a complete list of scholarly works, see: www.jeancharlot.org/writings.

¹⁷⁸ An abbreviated list includes: *Laukiamanuikahiki* (Snare that lures a far-flung bird), 1964, written in both Hawaiian and English; *Na Lono Elua* (Two Lonos), 1965; and *Mowentihke Chalman*, 1969, written in Nahuatl, Spanish, and English.

noted Mexican artists. He explained, “My desire to tell its story comes in part from a concern for the history of aesthetics, for to have assisted at birth of a national style is a rare event, as well worth recording as the birth of a volcano. But I have been moved also by a more subjective urge, inasmuch as the story of the making of the Mexican renaissance encompasses the autobiography of my early twenties.”¹⁷⁹ Charlot recognized the tremendous historic moment that he was a part of during the 1920s and saw the rebirth of Mexican art as intimately connected to the events of his own life.

While Mexico was never far from his mind, another part of his life that was connected to his scholarship was his practice of Catholicism. “He wrote not mediations but cogent essays about liturgical art, scathing about its failures, vivid in appreciating its achievement, seriously concerned about its future in America. He studied the works of others and knew the place of his own. He was distressed by mass-produced tasteless reproductions displacing good original art.”¹⁸⁰ Charlot held liturgical art to the same standards required of all other art.

From 1923 to 1979, Charlot illustrated fifty-two books.¹⁸¹ Throughout his career, he used his skill for illustration to further the great connection he had with children as he produced images for several children’s books.¹⁸² In fact, when Charlot died he was in the

¹⁷⁹ Jean Charlot, preface to *Mexican Mural Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), vii.

¹⁸⁰ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, Introductory text. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

¹⁸¹ Nancy J. Morris, “Los Libros Ilustrados por Jean Charlot,” *México en la obra de Jean Charlot* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1994), 100.

¹⁸² Melchor Ferrer, *Tito’s Hats* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1940); Dorothy Rhoads, *The Story of Chan Yuc* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1941); Margaret Wise Brown, *A Child’s Good Night Book* (New York: William R. Scott, Inc., 1943); Margaret Wise Brown, *Fox Eyes* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1951); and Dorothy Rhoads, *The Corn Grows Ripe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956).

process of completing a children's book for which he supplied the illustrations and his wife Zohmah wrote the text.¹⁸³

While he illustrated several books by other authors, he also created artist's books, entitled *Picture Book I* and *Picture Book II*. The images in *Picture Book I* focused on Mexico, while the works in *Picture Book II* addressed Hawai'i. For the *Picture Book I*, a small, book-sized project with thirty-two lithographs, Charlot wanted to create a book that offered a selection of his repertoire of images. It was a culminating piece in the sense that it presented imagery that he had developed since his arrival in Mexico. He often used the same images repeatedly across different media and favored certain types of figures and compositions. The *Picture Book* was a collaborative project between Charlot and Lynton Kistler (1897–1993), the artist's favorite printer.

In terms of the *Picture Book I*, Charlot wrote rhymed captions for the images, but instead of using them, he asked the French poet Paul Claudel (1868–1955) to write descriptions. Generally speaking, Claudel's writings and his attention to both spiritual concerns and his recognition of the struggle, power, and beauty of the rural worker inspired Charlot in his representations of the people.¹⁸⁴ Claudel was a highly regarded poet who often wrote in free verse. Later in life, he worked as a diplomat. Claudel's strong commitment to Catholicism was intertwined with his writings. Charlot developed an affinity for those who engaged in physical labor. Although it was not his own experience, he viewed the labor performed and endured by the people as a part of his world view and as a motivation for his art. Many of the multicolored images in the text demonstrate Charlot and Kistler's interest in the mastery of color lithography.

¹⁸³ Morris, "Los Libros Ilustrados por Jean Charlot," 100.

¹⁸⁴ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 102.

Charlot was in Los Angeles in 1933 working with printer Lynton Kistler and teaching at the Chouinard School.¹⁸⁵ Kistler was the son of a commercial printer who chose to work as frequently as possible with artists. After his brief time in L.A., Charlot continued to work with Kistler and often mailed him detailed instructions about color selection. The printer and the artist each possessed a pantone guide that they shared to keep track of specific colors. While Charlot would work with many printers during his career, he regarded Kistler as the best.¹⁸⁶ Of all their collaborations, it was the production of the *Picture Book I* with its brightly colored lithographs with multiple colors in a single work that is the most important.

Charlot's print *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1933 was the tenth work created for *Picture Book I* (fig. 17). Like all of the prints for *Picture Book*, Charlot applied an inscription, "Deflect your blade, Abraham,/From your son to the ram."¹⁸⁷ After hearing from the angel, Abraham let go of his son and killed a ram as an act of sacrifice. In Charlot's print, the figures are tightly packed within the pictorial space. The angular cloak of the flying angel contributes to the scene's dynamism. The raised knife in Abraham's hand is stopped by the angel's hand, which wraps around Abraham's fist—the proximity of the knife to the angel's arm and chest reinforces the dangerous aspect of the scene.

Sacrifice of Isaac refers to the biblical story in which Abraham, believing that he is following the word of God, takes his son Isaac to Mount Moriah, binds him, and raises a knife to kill him. Just as it appears that Abraham might murder his son, an angel sent from God stops the gruesome event. The angel informs Abraham that he does not have to

¹⁸⁵ The Chouinard School had multiple connections with Mexican muralism. Most notably, David Alfaro Siqueiros taught there briefly.

¹⁸⁶ Morse, xvi.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 98.

kill his son, but in attempting to follow this extraordinarily horrific request from God, Abraham has proven his loyalty to the word of God. Like many of Charlot's prints, *Sacrifice of Isaac* includes several colors. In this work, Charlot uses yellow, white, brown, pink, black, dark blue, and light blue colors, although the most striking are the bright green used for the background and the sharp yellow used for Abraham's robe. Charlot later recalled that this was likely his first representation of this particular biblical story, but that he would follow this print with three or four oil paintings.¹⁸⁸

While Charlot created stunning books of his own works, he was limited in his ability to analyze them. Charlot stated, "Yes, but I have a blind spot about my own work. I never criticize it. It is always the work of my fellow painters."¹⁸⁹ During his career, he wrote on disparate artists such as Juan Cordero, a nineteenth-century Mexican painter who created large, sweeping historical narratives, and Josef Albers, the German-born American painter who specialized in abstract minimalism. Charlot asserted, "It happens, however, that a percentage of me is an art critic, and I have written a few little books on the subject; and the other side of me is a practicing artist versus the art critic, and I have to fight with myself."¹⁹⁰ As mentioned previously, Charlot knew Albers personally, and after initially meeting him at the Black Mountain College, Albers spent some time with the artist in Hawai'i. Charlot wrote,

Thus, in Albers' art, geometry acquires dramatic undertones, man pleading his right to imperfections even as he handles the cold perfection of numbers and geometric relations. One could say that, in measuring mind against law, Albers humanizes geometry. He says, 'But for me a circle, a triangle, has a face,' and

¹⁸⁸ Morse, 98.

¹⁸⁹ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹⁰ Transcript of Jean Charlot's speech. Fine Arts Conference. Colorado Springs, Colorado (August 1, 1947), 1. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Museum Archives.

means it. For it is geometry only as it percolates inside man's nature and not geometry in a void that Albers treats of.¹⁹¹

Certainly, Albers's preferred aesthetic differed greatly from the type of work Charlot pursued, but Charlot found aspects of Albers's work that he could understand.

Scholars have often pondered why Charlot is not a more prominent part of the story of Mexican Muralism and the other artistic movements of the day. He is frequently mentioned as a supporting player, and had Charlot stayed in Mexico, he would likely be made to be a larger figure in the movement of Mexican modernism. For example, after arriving in Mexico, O'Higgins spent the rest of his life there and as a result, he has been more celebrated in terms of noteworthy exhibitions and publications produced in Mexico about his work. Furthermore, Charlot has only one extant large-scale mural in Mexico, and though he is noted for his printmaking, he left Mexico before the founding of the internationally respected Taller de Gráfica Popular in 1937.

Despite some neglect, during the 1968 Olympics there was a large Charlot retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City. The artist's old friend Anita Brenner wrote of the show, "The major retrospective of his work being put on in Mexico's national Museum of Modern Art is therefore an event in many ways, but most handsomely, an invitation to return and to be acknowledged as the great and gifted pioneer he indubitably was."¹⁹² Brenner knew well the tremendous contribution of Charlot to Mexican modernism, and she recognized the show as an important opportunity for the artist to be appreciated in Mexico, a place where he experienced great artistic

¹⁹¹ Jean Charlot, "Nature and Art of Josef Albers," *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays on Jean Charlot*. Volume I. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1972), 205.

¹⁹² Anita Brenner, "The Return of Jean Charlot," *Mexico/this month* (March/April 1968):29. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue were: *Jean Charlot: México 68 Programa Cultural de la XIX Olimpiada*, del 28 de marzo al 28 de abril (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo de Arte Moderno, 1968).

inspiration, but also was faced with many challenges and a lack of opportunity to fulfill his ambitious mission to be a prolific muralist.

Charlot wrote frequently about the contributions of Mexican culture and individual Mexican artists to art history. Furthermore, when Charlot died in 1979, he was one of the few remaining ambassadors of the Mexican mural movement. For example, he was asked to write the Foreword for the 1977 edition of *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, a survey book on the continued significance of murals by Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft. Charlot wrote, "Clear though your motives are to yourselves, a time may come when onlookers will have lost the key to their meaning. For the very reason that your murals document strictly contemporary attitudes, they deserve to last and enter history, as medieval shrines did, as Mexican murals do."¹⁹³ Charlot championed the power of murals and recognized their ability to possess cultural significance long after the issue that they might represent had ceased being salient in a contemporary context. For Charlot, murals were worthy of preservation and were a part of a community's shared history.

E. Charlot and the Mexican People

As mentioned previously, Charlot's ancestral connection to Mexico and his affinity for pre-Columbian artifacts contributed to his quick adjustment upon arriving in the country. He was drawn to rendering the indigenous people of Mexico, and women often figured prominently in his work. By repeatedly representing populations of Mexico that were so often ignored by mainstream artists throughout history, Charlot attempted to

¹⁹³ Jean Charlot, foreword to *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998 (1977)), x.

preserve the cultural legacy of the people. His beliefs as a Catholic were deeply tied to a commitment to social justice, and as we will see in later chapters, this connection was manifested in his creation of liturgical art for religious spaces. By rendering those who were historically denied basic human rights, Charlot attempted to perform social activism through his work. His interest in Mexican women was tied to his own close relationship to his mother, his respect for motherhood, and his reverence for the Virgin Mary. The women that Charlot portrayed regularly were likely related to his reverence to the Virgin Mary, and the representations of women with their children are linked to the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.

Charlot's print *Woman Standing, Child on Back*, 1933 is an example of a theme of motherhood that reoccurs frequently in his work (fig. 18). Specifically, Charlot depicts on several occasions a mother with a baby on her back. Mother and child are tied together by a traditional *rebozo*. This piece was created in Los Angeles and is based on a 1925 mural of the same subject. Another similar work, *Woman Washing*, 1933 comes from a period in which he created a group of nudes that were inspired by the pilgrimage that he took to Chalma (fig. 19).¹⁹⁴ He wrote, "The stream there is a little bit like Lourdes—there is certain good luck having to do with the water."¹⁹⁵ The types of women represented in *Woman Standing, Child on Back* and *Woman Washing* are common in Charlot's body of work, as they are the type of imagery that was inspired by the artist's friendship with Luz Jimenez, his frequent muse and model. Jimenez was an indigenous woman from Milpa

¹⁹⁴ Chalma is a small town in the state of Mexico, located approximately 95 kilometers from Mexico City. While a cave in the town was traditionally associated with the ancient deity of Oxtoteotl, during the sixteenth century locals found an image of a Black Christ. From the sixteenth century on, pilgrims have visited Chalma to worship the Black Christ. Today, Chalma is the second most visited pilgrimage site in Mexico (after the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe) as it welcomes over two million people annually.

¹⁹⁵ Morse, 119.

Alta who spoke Nahuatl (ancient language of the Aztecs) and taught Charlot her native language. Beyond knowledge of the language, Jimenez educated Charlot about traditional customs that he would not have known about if it were not for her willingness to share information. She was frequently used as a model by several significant twentieth-century artists working in Mexico, for example, Modotti. Charlot and Jimenez's relationship proved to be particularly fortuitous for the artist, as the people of Milpa Alta spoke a rare, classical form of Nahuatl, and Charlot accompanied Jimenez and her family on a sacred pilgrimage to Chalma.¹⁹⁶ Although in other portraits of Luz, Charlot chose a much more naturalistic portrayal of his muse, with *Luz*, 1933, he offers a more abstract representation of the model, particularly in his depiction of her block-like head; her voluminous body references monumental sculpture, evoking a sense of confidence and pride (fig. 20). The creases and edges of the large blue *rebozo* that covers her possess a sense of movement that counteracts the solid, stoic-like body of Luz. The bareness of the space, save for Luz, her clothing, and the chair she sits on, allows the viewer to focus on the subject, an indigenous woman who was close to the artist, but in this representation she also functions an icon for all indigenous women. The abstract, round, horse-shoe-like shape of Luz's hands draw the attention of the viewer by emphasizing the part of her body associated with physical labor.

The representations featured in many of his prints discussed previously also appeared in his prints of Mexico and in his mural art. Charlot's *Village Fiesta* at Syracuse University was completed during the spring of 1960 (fig. 21). The work is a part of the

¹⁹⁶ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture," 62.

artist's extensive commitment to making murals, some discussed earlier, that were realized on college campuses. *Village Fiesta* is a fresco, located in the University's Shaw Dormitory.¹⁹⁷ Laurence Schmeckebier, Professor of Fine Arts and Director, School of Art of the College of Fine Art at Syracuse University expressed to Charlot the excitement experienced by staff and students alike in reaction to Charlot's impending arrival to paint a mural.¹⁹⁸ Schmeckebier was an early champion of Mexican muralism and completed a major book *Modern Mexican Art* in 1939.¹⁹⁹

In describing *Village Fiesta*, Charlot stated:

I did a Mexican fiesta. For a long time I had wanted to do one of those village fiestas with girls dancing that I'll call malinches or malintzins in Indian with their little wooden swords and their rattles and so on. I have done many of these pictures of the subject but I wanted to do a mural of it. And I put it there on the wall of one of the dining rooms to the great astonishment of everybody concerned who asked me what relation there was between those little girls dancing and the University of Syracuse. Well, it was the dining room for the girls whose dormitory adjoined. So, I said that there were girls in the dining room and there were girls on the walls, and that was fine. Everybody liked it—it has nice colors and is a pleasant thing to look at.²⁰⁰

Here, Charlot stresses that not only was he pleased with the work, but that it was received positively by those at the University as well. While Charlot mentions that he created the mural depicting girls in part because it was located within a girls' dormitory, today Shaw Dormitory is a coed facility.

The composition of the mural presents several daily life scenes. From left to right the mural portrays early-morning cooking, a child taking first steps, a tortilla lesson, hair

¹⁹⁷ Laurence Schmeckebier to Jean Charlot, 15 April 1960. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Charlot was paid \$4,000 to produce the mural and to cover his personal expenses; this fee did not include the cost of additional labor and materials such as the work of a plasterer and the use of scaffolding.

¹⁹⁸ Laurence Schmeckebier to Jean Charlot, 15 April 1960, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

¹⁹⁹ Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *Modern Mexican Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1939).

²⁰⁰ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

braiding, and a child playing with a rattle. The mothers represented in this mural, teaching their children different traditions and ways of daily life, recall Charlot's collection of Images d'Epinal in France (fig. 3). In this quaint scene of domesticity, the artist also celebrates rituals of daily life and the customary work of women. Furthermore, these types of representations suggest the colonial legacy of visual aids made in Mexico, most notable the *Codex Mendoza*, 1541–42, used to illustrate to the Spanish Crown the customs of the native people. In the lower central portion of the mural, a mother encourages her daughter to participate in a ceremonial dance, the Dance of the Malinches, which unfolds at the right side of the composition. The Dance of the Malinches appeared in both small-scale and large-scale works by Charlot and in different media including prints, easel paintings, and a fresco mural.²⁰¹ The traditional Dance of the Malinche symbolizes two cultures (Spanish and indigenous) in competition with one another. Malinche interpreted for different societies, the Spanish and the given indigenous group they wished to communicate with, who at least in theory, attempted to understand one another. Although Charlot recalled that the subject matter of this mural related to the status of the building as a dormitory for young women, and Syracuse University officials were enthused to have an example of the artist's best-known subject matter, representations of Mexico, the mural's colonial overtones and its presentation of the relationship between mothers and their children make it an odd fit for a university dormitory in which young women were striking out on their own for the first time and were hopefully removed from a colonial context at an institution of higher learning.

²⁰¹ Malinche (or Malintzin) is the indigenous woman who served as an interpreter to Hernán Cortés after his arrival in Mexico. Malinche had been sold several times among different indigenous groups and learned languages quickly, making her an excellent interpreter.

F. Romantic Mexico and Beyond

Charlot described with great attention to detail his first Catholic experience in Mexico; in particular, he recalled the first mass he attended at the Cathedral of Veracruz where a priest of indigenous descent presided over the service. Ever the devout Catholic, Charlot remembered feeling uneasy at the service, as what he encountered was different from the church and clergymen that he knew in Paris. “For a while, I would be nothing but eyes, taking in this new face of the Church. I can only hope that, as in the case of the juggler somersaulting his devotions before Our Lady, there was a certain prayerful residue in my looking, or else I must confess to total distraction.”²⁰² The awe that Charlot experienced was in part a reaction to the priest who presided over the mass. Charlot’s ideas about Mexico were formulated in his mind long before he arrived in the country and surely he must have imagined what Mexico would be like before he arrived. This way of constructing narratives was typical of many of the colonists who traveled from Spain to Mexico. As the sixteenth century proceeded, rumors about Mexico developed quickly in Europe and many travelers heard sensational stories before embarking on their journeys across the Atlantic. Upon arriving in the Americas, a sense of romanticism for the geography and the people was long brewing. Centuries later, Charlot imagined what Mexico might be like before arriving in Mexico and after settling there, it provided him with the artistic inspiration that lasted throughout his career. While Charlot focused on specific aspects of Mexican culture such as indigenous tradition, he (unlike many of the foreign artists who had preceded him to Mexico) developed his opinions of Mexican culture after direct experience with individuals and their customs.

²⁰² Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 104.

John Charlot describes his father's interest in portraying indigenous people as meant "to combat the Western prejudices against Native Americans as cruel barbarians and to publicise [sic] their great cultural achievements."²⁰³ So often, Charlot presented various people engaged with instruments, tools, clothing, and other material possessions. He studied cultures like a trained anthropologist to make accurate depictions of a given society's material culture. These artifacts represented a deep connection to popular culture. Furthermore, Charlot rarely portrayed violent imagery. Unlike some of his fellow muralists, in particular David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, Charlot did not portray the Mexican Revolution. In fact, his first completed mural commission, the *Massacre in the Great Temple*, is one of the artist's few compositions to represent a violent scene. In continuing his assessment of his father's work, John Charlot writes of the artist's purpose, "Charlot would devote much of his life to revealing the native side of history and to promoting the understanding and appreciation of native cultures."²⁰⁴ With this estimation of the artist's intent, John Charlot may well be right, but this intention is not always evident in the work. In fact, Charlot tended to use a simplified approach to his understanding of Mexican identity. He writes, "Mexican tradition is a spark that oscillates between two equally valid poles, Indian and Spaniard."²⁰⁵ While in this quotation Charlot gives validity to both the indigenous and Spanish people, this simplified and limited bi-cultural viewpoint articulated by the artist became increasingly popular among artists in the 1920s who were schooled in academic traditions and rendered portraits of indigenous people that came to symbolize "indigenous culture" broadly or as a singular entity

²⁰³ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture," 61.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Jean Charlot, *Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 1.

without acknowledging the diversity or the exposure to change that happens within every traditional community. While one pole is Spanish, the other pole can simply not be “indigenous,” as different communities speak disparate languages and follow particular customs. Despite often being represented as one culture, different indigenous societies in Mexico retain individual characteristics.

During the 1920s, many artists in Mexico embraced *mexicanidad* (or Mexican-ness). As a part of the newfound interest in Mexican identity, *indigenismo* was a practice that involved the investigation, and in terms of the visual arts, the presentation and emphasis on the indigenous cultures of Mexico.²⁰⁶ Charlot later wrote, “I accepted as part of my patrimony the monstrous chubby forms of Indian idols,” recognizing his own Mexican heritage, but simultaneously emphasizing the physical forms of certain pre-Columbian idols in his construction of an identity for the native indigenous populations of Mexico.²⁰⁷ Charlot’s smaller scale works—mostly prints and paintings—tend to represent indigenous culture in a static way and evoke thoughts of a foreigner emphasizing native culture in a romanticized fashion. When considering his murals, Klarr disagreed with this viewpoint of Charlot’s work, asserting that Charlot’s murals were progressive in their presentation of native cultures. She wrote, “What stands out as possibly the most unconventional aspect of his life and work, however, is his original conceptual approach to subject matter, specifically his desire to create monumental, permanent, and public images of local, native, minority, colonized peoples, within an

²⁰⁶ Rivera and Kahlo are examples of artists that implemented both *mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* in their work. Long after abstraction had become a popular mode of artistic expression, artists continued this legacy. Charlot, Raúl Anguiano, and Francisco Zúñiga (1912–1998) remained dedicated to *mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*.

²⁰⁷ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 103.

environment dominated by global, non-native majority, colonizer cultures.”²⁰⁸ The mural *Village Fiesta* discussed previously, exemplifies this statement by Klarr. In its representation of indigenous women in a university space not visited by indigenous people, Charlot inserts the presence of a sector of the population that is often denied access to a university education. Furthermore, she argued that Charlot was a trailblazer: “His public artworks documented a populace of native Amerindians, Europeans, African-Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asian-Americans. I submit that Charlot was the only American artist of the twentieth century who created public, monumental artworks that represented such a diverse and inclusive perspective of the demographics of the United States.”²⁰⁹ While this declaration might be true, it is a grand statement and the question as to whether Charlot’s representations of diverse cultures are truly comprehensive remains unanswered. He was more inclusive than many of his contemporaries, and his time in Mexico, Hawai‘i, and later Fiji granted him a truly distinctive artistic vision. It is difficult, however, to ignore that Charlot was always an outsider and found motivation in the ways in which he was different from his subject matter.

Although much has been written on how the ancient arts of Mexico contributed to the development of Mexican modernism, and specifically the Mexican muralists, far less research has been conducted about the influence of ancient Hawaiian culture on the development of modernism. Artists such as Charlot who lived in Hawai‘i were able to seek inspiration from the colors of the featherworks and quilts and the forms of the sculpture and petroglyphs.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Klarr, 3.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 42.

²¹⁰ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture,” 67.

I believe that art has a virtue. I don't know if virtue should be understood in a regular theological context, but maybe *mana*, the old Hawaiian word, is closer. That is, good art encloses a certain power that comes to it from God, or if you want to use the pagan term, from the gods, and bad art lacks, is negative as far as that godly power is concerned. So it seems to me, of course, an absurdity to pretend to praise God with the form of art that would not contain Him, that would not accept Him and reject Him, so to speak. That's in a way why I think that the only liturgical art in the sense of the word doesn't depend on subject matter but on being good art.²¹¹

Here, the artist contends that the most important aspect of religious art is quality, not the specific representation of the religious image. For instance, an artist might have his own distinctive response to religion, but as long as his work was of quality, it was a valid work of art, and furthermore, as articulated by Charlot, "good art" derives from God. Charlot immersed himself in the study of ancient Hawaiian culture, and he embraced learning about various types of Hawaiian art.²¹² While Charlot knew Nahuatl, Spanish, French, and English, he also studied Polynesian dialects. The Bishop Museum provided him with an opportunity to study art, artifacts, and archival photographs.²¹³ In fact, within weeks of arriving in Hawai'i, Charlot was sketching objects at the Bishop Museum, including musical instruments and elaborate costumes.²¹⁴ Furthermore, Charlot's artistic inspiration after moving to Hawai'i developed quickly and after a few weeks, he already knew the concepts for his first mural commission on the islands, *Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawai'i*, 1949.²¹⁵ While ancient art such as sacred sculptures was particularly interesting to the artist, he also marveled at quilts, which were transformed

²¹¹ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.2 Sensitivity and Views."

²¹² Although he painted many representations of Hawaiian culture within Hawai'i, he did not represent Hawaiian culture in his murals in the continental United States. This is different from his continued representation of Mexican culture after he left Mexico. References to Mexico appear in his murals at the University of Georgia, his home in Colorado Springs, and Syracuse University.

²¹³ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture," 66.

²¹⁴ The Bishop Museum, located in Hawaii, is dedicated to scientific exploration and the preservation of cultural artifacts. It possesses the largest collection of cultural artifacts in Hawai'i.

²¹⁵ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture," 69.

from their original iteration as work by missionaries into “emblems of totemic power.”²¹⁶ In terms of more contemporary work, Madge Tennent (1889–1972) “gave him a sense of the monumental, heroic quality of Hawaiians.”²¹⁷ Born in London, Tennent lived in South Africa and New Zealand before settling in Hawai‘i with her husband in 1923. Tennent quickly embraced Hawaiian subject matter in her art. She was also active with the Honolulu Academy of the Arts, which was founded shortly before her arrival in 1922.

Charlot, on his part, not only embraced the local culture and history of Hawai‘i in his art, but he engaged with his community in his daily life as well. In 1950, he designed a print for the annual carnival at his church, Mary Star of the Sea. When he could, he liked eating at Helena’s Hawaiian Food (located at 1364 North King, Honolulu), where his works also decorated the walls.²¹⁸

Another important aspect of Charlot’s work was music, and the new types of instruments and rhythms that he encountered in Hawai‘i were a major influence. The inspiration he gleaned from music was most visible in his Hawai‘i works and specifically, his continued representation of drummers. Drummers in Hawai‘i resonated with the artist, and he created several versions of these particular musicians at work. His lithograph *War Drum*, 1950 was printed by Lynton Kistler in Los Angeles (fig. 22). The print was commissioned by the Honolulu Printmakers as a gift for their members. *War Drum* demonstrates the artist’s dedication to color lithography. Each color was drawn on four separate stones, resulting in final proofs with four superimposed printings. Another representation of drums produced by Charlot was a mural for a private residence owned

²¹⁶ Ibid, 66

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Walker, 9.

by John Young in 1950. Around the time that he created this lithograph and mural, he had recently completed a fresco for Bachman Hall, an administration building at the University (fig. 23). The mural, entitled *Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii*, 1949 has a man (on the left side) and a woman with a baby (on the right side), both dressed in traditional attire, flanking either side of the composition.²¹⁹ The main action of the mural is a musical performance with drummers and dancers. Traditional drums predominate, but gourd drums are in the scene as well. To the left side of the musical performance, workers engage in labor. The background includes dense foliage typical of Hawai‘i. Other important examples of large-scale murals by Charlot that directly deal with ancient Hawaiian culture include *Early Contacts of Hawai‘i with Outer World*, 1951–52,²²⁰ created for the Bishop Bank, which later became the First National Bank, and *Relation of Man in Nature in Old Hawai‘i* (a different mural, but it shares the same title as the earlier mural created for Bachman Hall), 1974, located on the campus of Leeward Community College in Pearl City, O‘ahu. It is located at the entrance of the College’s theatre.²²¹

After he moved to Hawai‘i, Charlot’s mural production in the US accelerated, both on the Islands and in the continental United States, where he received steady commissions throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. While his murals on the Islands tended to address either religious themes or the traditions of the Hawaiian culture, he did occasionally create works that dealt with current issues. Late in his career, from 1970 to 1975, he completed an enamel tile mural across the School Street façade of the United

²¹⁹ This work is less romanticized than some of Charlot’s representations of Mexico discussed earlier. The physical features of some of Charlot’s representations of indigenous Mexican women (for example, in his print, *Women Washing*) are exaggerated. In this mural the women and men’s figural forms are more angular and less defined. At the time that Charlot creates this work, he was increasingly drawn to abstract art as represented in his later liturgical works discussed in the next chapter.

²²⁰ Tragically the mural was destroyed in 1966 and divided into individual easel paintings.

²²¹ This mural was recently restored in 2007 by Viviana Domínguez.

Public Workers Building (officially, the Henry B. Epstein Building) in Honolulu (fig. 24). Isami Enemoto, a Honolulu-based ceramic expert, was the technician who engineered the realization of the complicated project.

The imagery on the building included representations of cafeteria workers, garbage collectors, hospital workers doing laundry, and various laborers participating in two different types of strikes on each side of the work (fig. 25–6). This subject matter, different from most of his large-scale work in its celebration of the modern urban worker, echoes the type of imagery popular among many WPA artists. In the protest represented on the left side of the mural, workers play music and dance at the State Capitol in Honolulu, while on the right side, workers carry picket signs in the rain with slogans such as “An injury to one is an injury to all.” Here, Charlot comes closer to the type of public art promoted by the Mexican muralists in his portrayal of rebellion and the plight of the worker; however, Charlot’s work was far less controversial. Instead of the red banners proclaiming slogans such as “land and liberty” in Rivera’s work, Charlot’s protest on the Capitol is a far more passive image; in fact, it appears more like a party than a protest. In Charlot’s representation, the workers gather, sing, play music, and dance as opposed to engaging in any overtly contentious behavior. Charlot’s representation of a protest corresponds more with the peace movement and the nonviolent protests against the Vietnam War that occurred in the US during the late 1960s and early 1970s and which Charlot supported. Covering the length of the façade of the building and created in front of the watchful eyes of the public, this large mural solidified his connection to the workers of Hawai‘i.

In fairly close proximity to the union headquarters on the island of O‘ahu, the Charlot family house in Kahala was designed by the artist in conjunction with the architectural firm Wimberly, Whisenand, Allison, Tong, and Goo.²²² Charlot created a fresco within the house that could be seen from the first floor (from a family room that looked onto a *lanai*) and from the second floor (from the master bedroom) (fig. 27). The art inside the home further demonstrates Charlot’s evolving ingenuity, his relationships with diverse cultures, and the artist’s direct involvement in the development of his family’s domestic space. Artistic inspiration was all around him in Hawai‘i. In the backyard, a tree that is representative of the native Hawaiian landscape stands tall. The roots of this tree appear in later works by Charlot. Ceramic tiles featuring interpretative representations of Hawaiian petroglyphs are located within the house and on the back of the house. Charlot wrote, “Petroglyphs and pictographs are a poignant reminder of this longing of the ancient Hawaiian for some sort of spiritual survival. Besides, these shapes of men and dogs, of fans and paddles and birds, seen from the vantage point of our twentieth century, deliver a message of beauty exciting as an adventure in aesthetic, untainted by the clichés of the European, Greco-Roman tradition.”²²³ These works reflect the artist’s interest in tiles, an interest that began in Mexico.²²⁴ In Mexico, artists continued the tradition of ceramic tiles that they gleaned from the Spanish colonists;

²²² “The artist Jean Charlot’s own designs in Ceramic Tile charm all who visit his family home...” Promotional document for the use of ceramic tiles, c.1977. single page. Jean Charlot Collection.

²²³ Jean Charlot, “Art in Hawai‘i,” *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1972), 229–230. This is an edited version of the original article which appeared in the Honolulu Advertiser. Statehood Edition. 1959.

²²⁴ “The artist Jean Charlot’s own designs in Ceramic Tile charm all who visit his family home...” Promotional document for the use of ceramic tiles, c.1977. single page. Jean Charlot Collection.

during the colonial period, churches and large homes often included elaborate tilework.²²⁵

Tiles were also used in the representation of religious imagery at Charlot's home. At the front door is a small tile representation of the Sacred Heart by Charlot (fig. 28). While the decoration near the front door remains, the tile piece on the back of the home that represented St. Francis has been removed.

Family, from Charlot's early childhood to his death, played a significant role in his life. First as a son to Henri and Anne, Charlot was exposed to influences that would stay with him throughout his life: Catholic iconography and Mexican history and culture. His family nurtured his artistic talent and inspired the watershed decision of his life; to move to Mexico with his mother was very much a decision that was a product of his family connections to the country. After practicing Mexican muralism in the 1920s, Charlot's mural career was just beginning when he settled in the United States. As Charlot traveled the country accepting teaching jobs and mural commissions, his family continued to grow. Charlot and his wife Zohmah would have four children. Once he settled in Hawai'i in 1949, family continued to be an important part of his life and when he was able to buy his house in Honolulu, he made art especially for the space.²²⁶ Just as family was a profound part of Charlot's life, so too was religion. From the beginning and throughout his professional life, religion transformed Charlot's work. The specific connections between his work and his Catholicism are revealed in the following chapter.

²²⁵ Many colonial towns possess homes and churches that demonstrate the popularity of tile work. The city of Puebla is known for its colonial tiles on the façades of private homes and within church spaces. Not far from Puebla is the small colonial town of Acatepec which boasts a church with an incredibly decorative tile façade.

²²⁶ The Charlot home is now owned by the University of Hawai'i and is overseen by the Department of Architecture at the University.



Fig. 1. Jean Charlot, Untitled, c. 1918
Wood relief, 49 3/16 x 19 1/16 x 1 1/2 inches
Private Collection, Del Mar, California
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 2. Bataille des pyramides from Imagerie de P. Didion, à Metz
 Print, 31 x 54 1/2 inches
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
 Photograph by author
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 3. Jeux de l'enfance, an example of Images d'Epinal
 Print, 15 1/4 x 11 5/8 inches
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
 Photograph by author
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

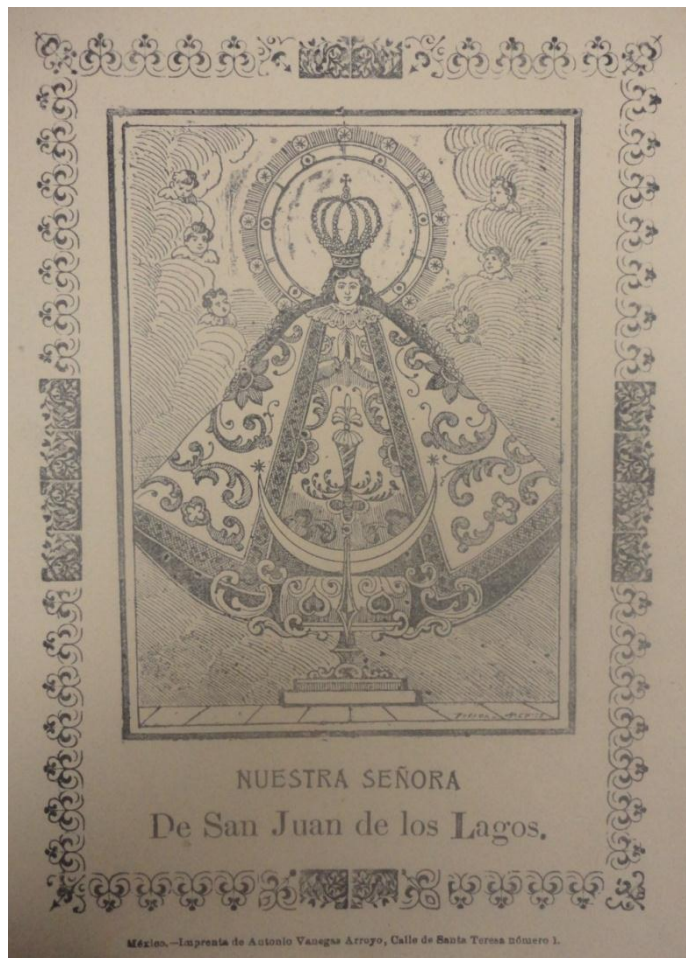


Fig. 4. José Guadalupe Posada, Nuestra Señora de San Juan de los Lagos, c. 1905

Print, 11 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 5. Jean Charlot, Les blessés au travail, 1918

Print, 5 1/2 x 9 inches

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 6. Jean Charlot, Massacre at the Main Temple, 1922–3
Fresco, 14 x 26 feet
Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 7. Jean Charlot, Dance of the Ribbons, 1923
Fresco, 16 1/3 x 7 2/3 feet
Ministry of Education, Mexico City
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu,
Hawai'i
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 8. Jean Charlot, *The High Comb*,
Yucatán, 1935
Print, 10 3/4 x 5 1/2 inches
Private Collection, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With
permission.



Fig. 9. Jean Charlot, Head, Crowned with Laurels, 1934–5
 Fresco, 16 x 20 inches
 Strauben-Muller Textile High School (now Baynard Rustin
 High School)
 New York, New York
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu,
 Hawai'i
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 10. Jean Charlot, *Cotton Gin*, 1942

Oil on canvas, 4 1/2 x 11 feet

McDonough Post Office, Athens, Georgia

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 11. Artist Unknown, Charlot working on a mural with students, c. 1941
Gelatin silver print, 3 x 4 1/2 inches
University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Forrest D. Colburn, 2011.3
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 12. Jean Charlot, *Time Discloseth All Things, Cortes Lands in Mexico, and Paratroopers Land in Sicily* (detail), 1944
 Fresco, 11 x 66 feet
 University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
 Photograph by Kathee Christensen
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 13. Jean Charlot, Time Discloseth All Things,
Cortes Lands in Mexico, and Paratroopers Land in Sicily
(detail), 1944
Fresco, 11 x 66 feet
University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
Photograph by Kathee Christensen
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 14. Jean Charlot, Mexican Kitchen, 1948

Oil on canvas, 20 1/8 x 24 1/16 inches

Private Collection, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 15. Jean Charlot, Woman (Profile), 1949
 Print, 6 x 4 inches
 The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Forrest D. Colburn,
 2009.18
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 16. Jean Charlot, Man's Wisdom Subdues the Aggressive Forces of Nature, 1951
Fresco, 25 x 25 feet
Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 17. Jean Charlot, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1933

Print, 8 x 6 1/4 inches

The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Jack Lord, 1972.244.h

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 18. Jean Charlot, *Woman Standing, Child on Back*, 1933
Print, 9 x 7 inches

The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Jack Lord, 1972.244.o
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

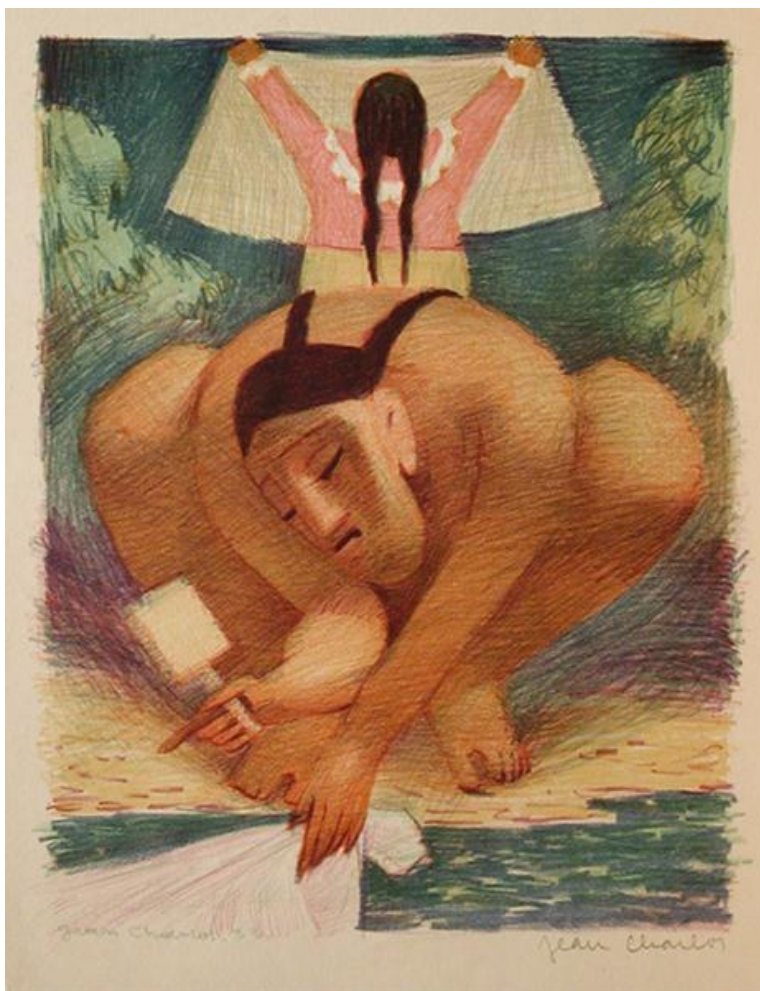


Fig. 19. Jean Charlot, *Woman Washing*, 1933
Print, 8 x 6 1/4 inches
The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Jack Lord,
1972.244.i
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 20. Jean Charlot, Luz, 1933

Print, 8 x 6 inches

The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Jack
Lord, 1972.244.k

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 21. Jean Charlot, Village Fiesta, 1960

Fresco, 9 x 45 feet

Syracuse University, New York

© 2012 Estate of Jean Charlot / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Courtesy of the Syracuse University Art Collection

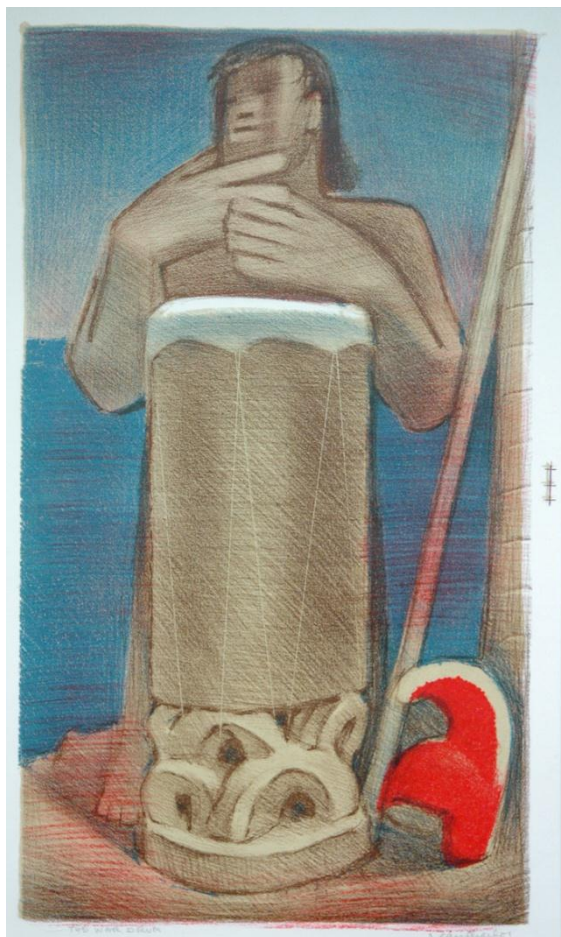


Fig. 22. Jean Charlot, War Drum, 1950
 Print, 14 x 8 inches
 The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs.
 William Gray Coutts in memory of her
 husband, 1967.13
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With
 permission.



Fig. 23. Jean Charlot, *Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawai'i*, 1949
Fresco, 10 x 29 feet
Bachman Hall, University of Hawaii at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 24. Jean Charlot, *On Strike at the Capitol, Refuse Collectors, Hospital Laundry, The Strike at Nuuanu, Road and Board of Water Supply Workers, and Cafeteria Workers and Custodians*, 1970–5

Ceramic tile, 11 x 13 feet (four panels) and 8 x 13 feet (two panels)

United Public Workers Building, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 25. Jean Charlot, *On Strike at the Capitol*, 1970
United Public Workers Building, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Ceramic tile, 11 x 13 feet
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 26. Jean Charlot, *The Strike in Nuuanu* (detail), 1973

Ceramic tile, 11 x 13 feet

United Public Workers Building Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

III. CHARLOT AND RELIGIOUS ART

Attempting to divide Charlot's life and work into two separate chapters based on secular and nonsecular factors makes for an impossible task. In the process of telling the story of his life, his teaching, and his connection to Hawaiian and Mexican cultures in the previous chapter, the guidance of Catholicism was always present. Furthermore, as stated earlier, many religions were influential to Charlot in his artistic practice. Art historian Caroline Klarr wrote of Charlot, "His attitudes expressed a particular interpretation of Catholicism that stressed an inclusive definition of the Christian community regardless of ethnicity, cultural background, or religion."²²⁷ Although Catholicism was undoubtedly the most influential religion in Charlot's life, his Catholic faith did not inhibit his interest in native spiritual practices or prevent his regard for diverse practices of Christianity. Given Charlot's tremendous involvement with Christianity and the art that he produced as a result of his practice of Catholicism, this chapter focuses on the people he met and the liturgical work he created, with specific attention to murals and other large-scale works.

While the muralists such as Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros disavowed religion, Charlot embraced Catholic churches as locations for his murals and other liturgical art. Orozco aligned himself with anarchists and Rivera and Siqueiros were drawn to Communism. Siqueiros followed a more radical path in his beliefs, as he was arrested for the attempted assassination of Leon Trotsky, and he championed Josef Stalin's ideologies. In contrast, although Rivera professed himself a devoted Communist, he was at one point in his life dismissed from the Party, mainly due to the friends he kept in both

²²⁷Klarr, 2.

Mexico and in the United States and his consistent acceptance of mural commissions in the US.²²⁸ In comparison to Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, Charlot's practice of Catholicism and his affinity for liturgical art seem conservative. Throughout his life, Charlot separated himself from *los tres grandes* by accepting several commissions for functioning churches and other spaces associated with the Catholic faith, for example, St. Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana (1955); St. Catherine's Church, Kaua'i, Hawai'i (1958); St. Gabriel's Church in Charlotte, North Carolina (1959); and St. Francis Xavier Church in the province of Ra, Fiji (1962–3). In addition to the Catholic spaces, Charlot completed large-scale projects in Protestant churches such as Kailua Methodist Church on O'ahu, Hawai'i (1958) and Grace Episcopal Church on Molokai, Hawai'i (1967).

A. Charlot and Large-Scale Religious Works in the Midwest

A number of churches, particularly in the Midwest, offered Charlot opportunities to create new murals or other large-scale projects. Charlot quickly gained a following in the United States, and because he was paid minimally and occasionally donated works to churches instead of receiving pay, he was always commissioned by the churches for these projects. He did not have to apply or propose a mural; his reputation preceded him in a way that it had not in Mexico. As a part of my discussion of murals, I have included various Stations of the Cross projects and other works that when displayed together, suggest a monumental scale. Charlot was willing to travel to obscure places to make murals. Churches with fairly small congregations in places such as Farmington, Michigan; Centerville, Ohio; Atchison, Kansas; and River Grove, Illinois possess works by Charlot. Of all the mural projects in the Midwest, the frescos at Our Lady of Sorrows

²²⁸ Bertram D. Wolfe, *Diego Rivera: His Life and Times* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), 257–9.

in Farmington, Michigan and the Benedictine Abbey in Atchison, Kansas were the largest and most significant and are distinctive from his other liturgical murals in the continental United States. The 1950s proved to be a prominent period for the artist, though his earliest religious works for churches date to the 1930s, and he continued to produce large-scale works until his death. Many of these projects were the result of various communications between the church leadership and the artist.

The Stations of the Cross at St. Cyprian's in River Grove, Illinois were made in New York while Charlot was living in an apartment on Fifty-Seventh Street in the 1930s. The fourteen oil paintings portraying the Stations of the Cross were not created in numerical order.²²⁹ The leader of St. Cyprian's, Father Arthur Douaire, simply asked Charlot if these works could be installed in his church and the artist happily agreed. Apparently, no other enterprising priest had thought to ask before.²³⁰ After a lengthy tour of the United States, where they were exhibited in Chicago, Colorado Springs, Denver, New York, and San Francisco, the paintings of the Stations were officially installed in their new home in March of 1957 (fig. 29).²³¹ Charlot was willing to let the Father have them for his church, as he had always been clear that despite their extensive display, they were not for sale. The artist's early representations of Stations of the Cross reveal his passion for popular art as well as his dedication to Catholicism. Station 6 portrays Veronica wiping the face of Jesus (fig. 30), using an array of colors from the yellow and red hues in the sky, the greenish blue landscape, and the brown used for the robe of

²²⁹ These paintings have been on view intermittently and when the site was last visited, they were not currently on view as the works were in storage.

²³⁰ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*. Extended labels. Jean Charlot Collection.

²³¹ Ibid.

Christ and the background of the *tondo*. The range of colors is similar to those in the prints that Charlot worked on with Lynton Kistler during this period but differs from the later, more monochromatic Stations he created in Hawai‘i. All of the Stations at the River Grove church are presented with a *tondo* composition, circular works created by Charlot in both painted and printed form that reference the Italian Renaissance tradition.

While the works at St. Cyprian’s in River Grove were made in the 1930s and pre-date the later liturgical works that he created for various churches, they were installed during a period in which Charlot’s reputation was quickly rising. Indeed, the 1950s were a successful decade for Charlot in terms of liturgical art and secular murals as well. Despite the fact that they have been ignored by scholars, two of his most significant and monumental liturgical mural cycles are the works he created in Atchison, Kansas and the work he produced in Farmington, Michigan.

After accepting a commission and signing a contract, Charlot traveled to Atchison, Kansas in 1959 and completed three murals for St. Benedict’s Abbey, a religious space that overlooks the Kansas Plains. The most prominent of his works at the site was *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life* (fig. 31). Two smaller works, *St. Joseph’s Workshop* and *Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Four Apparitions*, are located in the crypt (fig. 32). Given Charlot’s time in Mexico and the way in which the culture continued to influence him throughout his life, it is surprising that he did not represent the Virgin of Guadalupe more often. His more important representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe were for a book cover and this mural he was asked to produce for the Abbey

(fig. 33).²³² The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has been used in many political situations since its early colonial beginnings and was embraced by the Mexican American community in the United States, where it continues to have resonance today. Although Charlot did not often represent the Virgin of Guadalupe in his work, he possessed an affinity for the devotion of the Virgin. He explained, “My piety paralleled the mixed aesthetic of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, robed in tints so light and so dark of skin, dressed in the insignia of an Aztec princess, impressed by Heaven on a lowly palm mat, but with a clarity of statement worthy of a Poussin.”²³³ Charlot expressed a great appreciation for the Virgin of Guadalupe and saw his own cultural background reflected in her story. Moreover, he was able to combine his education and exposure to European art, like the restrained paintings of Poussin with the traditional Mexican culture that so inspired him, to develop a wholly original style that was a product of diverse influences.

Murals are usually tied to the architectural spaces in which they are created. Most muralists have to contend with the structural issues brought on by the built environment in which they work. The fact that the church that houses *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life* was completed in 1957 was not a coincidence. The completion date was planned to coincide with the one-hundred-year anniversary of the arrival of the first Benedictine monk in Atchison, Kansas.²³⁴ Barry Byrne (1883–1967), a prominent church architect and a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright, was the architect of the project. Father Dennis Meade discussed the architectural design of the church, “When the church was

²³² The Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most visited religious shrine in Mexico. The Catholic faithful believe that Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego at the site of the Basilica (the hill of Tepeyac) in 1531.

²³³ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 107

²³⁴ *A Self-Guided Tour of the Abbey Church*. Pamphlet. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

built, public opinion among those interested in church design favored simplicity of interior decoration. Hence, it was decided that the main altar would be the only altar in the principal part of the church. Instead of the traditional side altars dedicated to Mary and Joseph, two chapels in the crypt were dedicated to our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Joseph, the worker.”²³⁵ Although the sensibility of the church was simple, the materials were carefully selected. The altar was constructed from Carrara marble from Italy, the pews and choir stalls were built from solid white oak, the floors were made from Kasota buff fleuri, the ceilings consisted of aluminum pan acoustic and porcelain enamel tiles, and the exterior was Winona Limestone with the interior being from Indiana Limestone and red brick. All of these details contributed to the distinctive setting of the Abbey.²³⁶

Charlot’s journey with the Benedictine monks began when he was sent a letter from the leader of the Abbey, Cuthbert McDonald, on January 15, 1958 asking him to create a fresco on the east wall of the new building.²³⁷ After Charlot expressed interest in the project, McDonald sent him a letter suggesting a wide-range of topics pertaining to Benedictine life and history that would be appropriate for the mural.²³⁸ The rapid exchange of letters between a religious leader of a given parish and Charlot were typical practice in order to agree upon the details of the project. The correspondence tended to be cordial, though there were circumstances in which the artist and a particular church leader disagreed briefly about the direction of a mural, as was the case with his Centerville, Ohio initiative; however, as far as the Atchison work was concerned, the correspondence

²³⁵ Dan Madden, “Ship of the Prairie,” *Kansas Monks* (Winter 2008): 13.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Cuthbert McDonald to Jean Charlot, 19 January 1958, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²³⁸ ———. 13 May 1958, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

tended to be positive.²³⁹ Once the details for the Kansas project were sorted out, it was decided that the artist would receive fifteen dollars per square foot and that the Abbey would be responsible for the scaffolding and masonry work, while the artist would supply other art materials and of course, the art itself.²⁴⁰

Just one year before he finished the project for the Abbey, Charlot completed his vision for the main mural located behind the altar with a small-scale preparatory work (fig. 34). This work functioned as a map for the later project, though the figures depicted are far less defined than in the final product. The center of the composition of *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life* is a square-cut cross framed in aluminum that extends in relief four inches from the rest of the mural. This sculptural component is atypical of the artist's work. The relief portrays God, the Father at the top of the mural, a dove representing the Holy Spirit, and finally Christ on the cross, though he is depicted without suffering. This approach is characteristic of Charlot's representation of Christ on the cross and calls to mind his mural at St. Catherine's, *The Compassionate Christ*, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Charlot described his Christ for the Benedictine Abbey in the following terms, "Rather there is something of his glorification evident. This is in keeping with art traditions of pre-Gothic times, when Christ was shown in glory on the cross, not in agony."²⁴¹ This sort of representation differs greatly from the kind of depictions of Christ historically portrayed in Mexico. During the colonial period, representations of Christ on

²³⁹ In the creation of his mural depicting the Calvary in Centerville, Ohio, there were many letters exchanged between Charlot and the head priest regarding how the Calvary should be "accurately" portrayed. File #43. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

²⁴⁰ Jean Charlot to Father Abbot, 10 July 1958, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

²⁴¹ *A Self-Guided Tour of the Abbey Church*. Pamphlet. Jean Charlot Collection.

the Cross were bloody and emphasized the physical pain experienced by Christ. This tradition has continued to the present, particularly in smaller churches, in the form of sculptural, three-dimensional representations of the crucifixion.

Charlot was deeply influenced by many aspects of Mexican culture, including Catholic ritual; however, his pictures of the crucifixion demonstrate that although he was a well-traveled artist inspired by diverse cultures, he did not just copy what he gleaned from various sources. Instead, Charlot took elements from many influences and then developed his own distinct interpretation of liturgical art, choosing a modern, spare representation for the best-known event in Christianity. Furthermore, just as more violent representations of Christ's crucifixion common in many churches in Mexico portray the emotion associated with great tragedy, Charlot's more minimalistic and abstract depictions of Christ evoke drama in the way in which they are stripped of any ornate detail. Ultimately, his art demonstrates hybridity; born from varied roots, his works result in something completely new within the context of religious iconography.

In addition to the raised portions of the mural, which make up a large cross structure, are depictions of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica, twins who were both influential religious figures who lived around 500 AD. The portraits of these saints are below the representation of the crucifixion. St. Benedict relates to the name of the Abbey, but the depiction of the twins is appropriate for the Abbey and the college, as St. Scholastica founded a nunnery, and she and her brother would meet once a year and discuss great spiritual concerns.²⁴² During the last of their annual discussions, St. Scholastica prayed that her brother would not leave so that they could continue their deep

²⁴² Donald Attwater with Catherine Rachel John, "Scholastica," *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 315.

conversations through the night.²⁴³ Given their devotion to spiritual knowledge and their commitment to intellectual discussion, the representation of these particular saints seems fitting for an Abbey affiliated with a college. The arms of the raised cross portray angels and the symbols and relics associated with the Passion of Christ.

The other parts of *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life*, meaning those not portrayed in relief, depict specific scenes related to Benedictine life of the Abbey. In the upper right portion of the mural, the founder of St. Benedict's Abbey, Father Henry Lemke is represented caring for a sick man lying in bed. The ceiling beams in the space where Lemke attends to the sick are a feature that reoccurs in Charlot's work, for example, in his painting, *Mexican Kitchen*, 1948. In the lower right portion of the mural, Charlot presents the early educational efforts of the monks by depicting two monks at work while a small child sits below the carpenter's table. The carpenter's table or sawhorse appears similar to the work space rendered in Charlot's depictions of Joseph's carpenter shop. While Charlot was inspired to create portraits of people he met within his murals, this one differs in its emphasis on a religious order, an attribute that separates this work from the artists' other compositions.²⁴⁴

Charlot was often helped by local residents and members of the church community. In Atchison, Kansas, several of the monks participated in the facilitation of Charlot's work, for example Brother Martin Burkhard (1916–2010) was particularly

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ His murals for the National Preparatory School included a few portraits of friends. The project for the Kahua Ranch included portraits of a number of people who worked on the property. For the mural cycle in Fiji, he drew great inspiration from the people around him.

involved with the making of the fresco, reviewing plans, and climbing the scaffolding.²⁴⁵

Later Burkhard remembered, ‘He allowed me, Dennis McCarthy [of St. Benedict’s College art department], Charlot’s son John—almost anybody—to help.’²⁴⁶ McCarthy offered this description of Charlot, “If you were around the painting sure more than half an hour, he’d give you a brush and say, ‘Now go and do this.’”²⁴⁷ While his assistants on the Atchison project mostly worked to help prepare the walls before painting commenced, Charlot did allow Burkhard and some of the others to apply pigment to the plaster before it dried. Later Charlot would go over the pigments with his own brushwork to ensure a final product that met his expectations. Burkhard continued, “What struck me about him was his kindness. He was extremely kind, patient, a calm person... a patient man with beginners. We made mistakes, but he put up with them.”²⁴⁸ This personal recollection filled with admiration for the artist was echoed by many.²⁴⁹

Charlot’s official commitment to the Brothers in Atchison entailed the realization of two murals—one for the upper church and the other for the lower church. Later in the summer, after much of the work was completed on the murals, Charlot shared with the Brothers that because of their gracious help he wanted to give the Abbey a third fresco. Charlot’s fresco *Joseph and his Carpenter Shop* was a gift to the Abbey. For his donation, Charlot painted one of his favorite and most frequently evoked images. In this

²⁴⁵ “We remember... Brother Martin Burkhard (May 7, 1916–June 20, 2010),” *Kansas Monks* no.3 (Fall 2010), 4.

²⁴⁶ Another assistant on the project was Brother Walker Landwehr who managed the level of the scaffold and physically moved it up and down when Charlot needed to paint different areas of the fresco.

²⁴⁷ Regis F. Hickey, “Charlot: Loved Man of Art,” *Kansas Monks* 5, no.1 (February 1995):5.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ A review of several issues of *Kansas Monks* revealed the personal affection that many felt for Charlot in Kansas. Moreover, I was struck by the consistently glowing statements about the artist that I encountered during my research at the Jean Charlot Collection in Honolulu, Hawai‘i during March 2011.

particular rendition, the Christ child tries to hammer a nail, in an attempt to copy Joseph's action.

Charlot repeated the image of Joseph in his carpenter shop in many manifestations. Some of the examples are found in the doors he produced for the Punahou School in Honolulu (made with the assistance of the artist Evelyn Giddings) and a mural created as a part of the cycle produced in Ra, Fiji. In addition, an easel painting, *Joseph's Carpenter Shop*, 1957, represents one of Charlot's favorite scenes (fig. 35): Joseph working in his studio with baby Jesus playing on the floor. Joseph's keen ability to work with his hands and his loving role as a father appealed to the artist and reflected the artist's own personal experiences. His portraits of Joseph function as surrogate self-portraits. Moreover, Charlot's interest in Joseph's labor corresponds to the thread of socialism active among left-leaning Catholics in that he revered the worker and saw his struggle in the context of their religious faith.

In reviewing the significance of the Charlot's work Father Meinrad stated, "For fifty years the monks and our guests have daily gathered in the Abbey Church to pray the Psalmody of the Liturgy of the Hours, and to enter into the daily celebration of the Eucharist under the Charlot fresco."²⁵⁰ Daily life at the Abbey has been conducted with Charlot's work as the backdrop. Meinrad continued, "These themes of healing, spiritual welfare, charity, and working together for the common good flow from the life of the Trinity, the fresco leads us beyond looking at ourselves as independent agents to seeing the unity that is ours in Christ, of course the Angels depicted in the fresco, who aided

²⁵⁰ Dan Madden, "Ship of the Prairie," *Kansas Monks* (Winter 2008):15.

Christ in his passion, also aid us in following after.”²⁵¹ Meinrad identified the Abbey as a living, breathing space and from his vantage point the fresco functions as a spiritual companion and guide for the monks.

A few years after completing the project in Atchison, Charlot accepted a commission offered to him by the leaders of a church in Farmington, Michigan where, like the Abbey project, he completed a large mural situated behind an altar. The town of Farmington, Michigan was founded in 1824 by the Powers, a Quaker family who had moved from Farmington, New York. Our Lady of Sorrows Church is located in Farmington, but it serves both the towns of Farmington and Farmington Hills.²⁵² Like many of the churches where Charlot received commissions, Our Lady of Sorrows contains works by other artists; for example, the mosaics of *The Holy Family* and *Our Lady of Perpetual Help* designed by Melville Steinfelds, and a large metal cross located in the reflecting pool outside of the church produced by sculptor Marshall Fredericks are other works present on the campus of Our Lady of Sorrows.²⁵³

For the Farmington commission, *Our Lady of Sorrows and the Ascension of our Lord*, 1961, Charlot took inspiration from the name of the church, Our Lady of Sorrows (fig. 36). The customary method of producing murals tied to the name or history of a specific church was typical of Charlot’s approach to religious commissions. For example, as addressed previously, Charlot’s mural in Atchison, Kansas, *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life*, 1959, is located in the monastic chapel at St. Benedict’s Abbey and on the campus of Benedictine College. Although Charlot was conservative in his intent to

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² *Our Lady of Sorrows, 1927-1977* (South Hackensack, New Jersey: Custombook, Inc., 1977), 4.

²⁵³ Ibid, 22.

create a mural directly tied to the name of the church in Farmington, he still wanted to produce something unexpected and therefore, he chose to portray a sorrow that was linked to Christ's Mysteries. The sorrows of Mary, as they are typically conceived were already represented in the church's windows. Also, given that the mural was behind the main altar, Charlot recognized that an image of Christ was most appropriate and so he thought of a way to link Mary's sorrow and a physical representation of Christ that would be embraced by the congregation.²⁵⁴

While the ascension of Christ is conventionally conceived of as a glorious event, it simultaneously represents the separation of Mother and Son. The duality of the event resulted in Charlot's dynamic color presentation in which yellow hues are used to demonstrate Christ's ascension into heaven and the darker hues surrounding Mary are used to delineate the apostles and to symbolize their sadness. This central component of the composition, Christ ascending to the heavens, is flanked by references to the Passion. To the right of Christ, an angel holds a piece from Veronica's veil, while on the left an angel carries some pieces of linen from the entombment. For Charlot, the portrayal of these items was not only in reference to the Passion, but also suggests compassion, an emotion often associated with Mary.²⁵⁵ Christ and Mary are the two central figures of the mural with Christ ascending above the head of Mary. The long rectangular shapes that constitute the bodies of Christ and Mary might appear stiff at first glance, but given further consideration, their angular shape and the pairing of their shapes makes for a dynamic composition that sets itself apart from other forms of liturgical art that simply

²⁵⁴ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁵⁵ *Our Lady of Sorrows, 1927-1977*, 22.

imitate European historical models. The dominant color filling in the background behind Mary is red, while the background color behind Christ is purple. Although the purple hues behind Christ seem unusual and rather nontraditional for the background of a mural located behind the altar, the color of purple is associated with Lent and the death and resurrection of Christ. Surrounding Mary to her left is a prophet who holds a scroll which signifies the Old Testament.²⁵⁶ Above him, an angel points to the scroll referencing his own inspiration. To the right of Mary appears St. John the Evangelist, holding a book that symbolizes the New Testament. Another angel appears above the head of St. John the Evangelist.

Like all of Charlot's projects, the logistics of the Farmington mural cycle were a carefully negotiated process. Charlot's preferred mason in the Midwest, Paul Hendrickson, scouted the Farmington church site and his report raised some concerns for Charlot. In particular, Charlot stressed two important points: he was surprised to learn that the wall had a finish on it, as he thought it was understood that it would be best if the wall was completely bare, and that there were eight lights already embedded in the ceiling.²⁵⁷ With some urgency, Charlot wrote to the church's architect, Charles D. Hannan, to find out if the lights were permanent; if this was the case, he would have to re-arrange the location of the angels on the ceiling.²⁵⁸ Charlot was diligent in his preparations. As many of his murals in the continental United States were created during vacation periods (summer and winter), he always needed to work out as many details as possible in advance because his stays in the different communities where he worked were

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Jean Charlot to Charles Hannan, 8 April 1961, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

never extensive. Charlot made Hendrickson a stipulation of his contract for the commission in Farmington, as he trusted him to plaster his walls as he had done on numerous other projects.²⁵⁹

As was frequently the case, several noteworthy individuals helped Charlot in the realization of this mural. In addition to Hendrickson, Brother James Roberts (who was mentioned earlier) had rich experiences as a painter and made a loyal assistant. Other assistants on this mural were Charlot's son Martin, who was in high school at the time of the mural's creation, and his eldest son John, who was studying at Harvard at the time.

Debates about liturgical art are inherent to the creation of visual work with religious iconography held sacred by both individuals and a community at large. Charlot remembered that the parish priest in Farmington, Monseigneur Beahan, visited several of his mural sites in the Midwest before offering him the Farmington commission. He recounted, "I think that at the beginning at least he may have had a few reservations about the art that I make which is, of course, original if you are not acquainted with it. But very soon he realized, I am sure, that the things were sincerely thought out and would be better than standardized art."²⁶⁰ The danger of offending people was a natural part of the production of community art—whether it was secular or nonsecular. Charlot professed patience for those who had concerns about his art; he knew it pushed boundaries in comparison to traditional religious works that were far less modern and evocative of historical European styles like Gothic, Renaissance, or Neo-Classical.

²⁵⁹ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

In an effort to assure the leaders of the church that the design would be appropriate and to clarify the dimensions with the architect, Charlot drew preparatory designs to serve as a model (figs.37). Charlot later recalled,

I had a three-dimensional model of the church and I built up paper dolls the size of parishioners and put them in the different places where they would be in the traffic, we could say, of the church—kneeling at pews, kneeling at the Communion rail, taking the extreme side views so that the angels that they would see from there would be looking at them. And what you call the dead angle on the ceiling is, of course, seen from the Tabernacle and the Blessed Sacrament so that it should also be decorated. There was a suggestion that it could be left blank but I felt it wouldn't be the proper thing in a church, which is the House of God, not to do the same work for God that we would do for man.²⁶¹

Charlot's murals were often the result of careful planning and preparatory drawings. In some cases Charlot made brief sketches, but for the most part, more elaborate preparations were made; in a few cases, paintings exist that were produced in the planning process for the larger murals. The three-dimensional aspect of this particular model stands out from other projects. Furthermore, the challenging aspect of the wall and ceiling mural in Farmington made it an exceptional commission for the artist. This was his only religious mural in which the work extended beyond the vertical wall positioned behind the altar. In the case of the Farmington mural, the soaring composition was made more dynamic by its near seamless extension from the vertical wall behind the altar to the ceiling above it.

B. Religious Commissions in Hawai'i

Charlot created twenty-six monumental projects in Hawai'i. Although the majority of his liturgical works were installed in Catholic churches, Charlot also completed religious works for a ranch, a hospital, schools, and Protestant churches on the

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Hawaiian Islands. Charlot believed that only modern art should be used for the decoration of modern churches. He argued that the use of historic styles like Gothic implied that religion was stuck in the past and had no resonance in contemporary circumstances. In response to those who thought that his modern point of view was inappropriate for religious art, he claimed that when historically accepted forms like Gothic architecture and art first appeared in churches there were many who criticized these styles as well.²⁶²

After arriving in Honolulu, Charlot quickly received a mural assignment from the University and other secular commissions soon followed. A small mural on the Big Island brought together his commitment to the worker and his dedication to liturgical art. Ronald Von Holt was the manager of Kahua Ranch in Kohala, Kamela, Hawai‘i. Von Holt and businessman Atherton Richards purchased their Kahua lands in 1928 and began their cattle business. To this day, the families continue to work the land side by side. Following the untimely death of Von Holt at the age of 55 in 1953, Richards commissioned Charlot to paint a mural in honor of his friend and business partner.

In Hawai‘i, as in Mexico, Charlot developed a warm familiarity with people. He continued to be inspired by the common man and universal experience. Charlot brought his family to the Kohala Ranch when he worked on the fresco, a nativity scene, on August 26 and 27, 1953 (fig. 38).²⁶³ He brought his family with him when he made the work. Charlot had Kahua people pose for him.²⁶⁴ The model for Mary was Ida Lincoln, the cook at the Kahua Ranch. Her son, Butchie, was used as the model for a young boy attempting to grab the neck of a calf. The Kahua foreman and a longtime friend of the

²⁶² Lois Schumacher, “The Work of Jean Charlot,” *Today* (March 1949):8.

²⁶³ The mural was created over a two-day period.

²⁶⁴ Maile Melrose, “A Poignant Painting in a Quiet Kahua Chapel,” *Waimea Gazette* (December 1999): 11.

recently deceased Von Holt, John Iokepa served as Charlot's model for a man looking into the stable. Photographs of Von Holt were used as the source material for a portrait of the man in which he kneels before baby Jesus. Charlot portrays Von Holt in his trademark attire: a ten-gallon hat, boots, and spurs. The content of the composition links together the experience of the day laborers and the life of the Holy Family. They are tied not only in the composition in relation to their own faith and worship of the nativity scene, but also the lives of the workers are depicted in parallel with Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. The Catholic faith is presented as an intrinsic part of the lives of the working class.

Just as his fellow artists had influenced him in Mexico and in the continental United States, Charlot embraced his contemporaries in Hawai'i; more so than ever before, colleagues in Hawai'i became active participants in the realization of his liturgical art. Claude Horan (b.1917) was a collaborator on several projects with Charlot, he came to Hawai'i and accepted a teaching position at the University of Hawai'i. He quickly recognized, however, that he enjoyed making ceramics as opposed to teaching the art of ceramics.²⁶⁵ Like Charlot, Horan's intentions when he came to the University of Hawai'i proved different from the reality. Horan founded Ceramics Hawai'i when he saw the need for a specialized ceramics company to serve the construction industry on the island of O'ahu.

One of the projects that Charlot and Horan worked on together was a commission for the Kailua Methodist Church in Kailua, Hawai'i. The artists collaborated on five tiles

²⁶⁵ Unidentified document from the Jean Charlot Collection entitled, "The Charlot/Horan Murals" the description states: Much of this information comes from a taped interview with Claude Horan recorded on October 1992." Folder 44. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

that were installed on November 9, 1958. Within the tiles were circular shapes that presented symbolic elements that would inspire the parishioners to think about Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Oikumene, the subjects of the tiles.²⁶⁶ The most surprising tile, of course, is the one that presents Oikumene, a Greek word that signifies the inhabited world (fig. 39). Charlot portrays Oikumene with a cross on top of a boat sailing on the ocean. This representation possesses dramatic colonial undertones as Charlot depicts the spread of Christianity to distant lands. There are few materials that discuss this work—few preparatory drawings, notes, or other materials. Zohmah Day Charlot surmised that because he was so preoccupied with the St. Francis Hospital commission from 1958 to 1959, he might not have had the extra time to prepare for his work for the Kailua Methodist Church, so he therefore recorded little information about the project.²⁶⁷

The St. Francis Hospital project also involved ceramic tiles and provided Charlot with a tremendous opportunity to pursue a religious commission in a public venue that would be viewed by diverse audiences. Charlot conducted research regarding patron saints and their relationships with the medical profession to identify the appropriate saints for fields like medical technology and radiology. By doing this work, Charlot linked religion and healthcare professions. The artist's ceramic tiles, which he worked on from 1958 to 1975, with the majority being completed by 1959, appear both inside and outside the hospital. The ceramic tiles represent saints such as St. Francis, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Michael. Another ceramic tile portrays a saint hovering over scientific

²⁶⁶ Charlot had begun experimenting with the *tondo* as a way in which to represent the Stations of the Cross during the 1930s in New York City.

²⁶⁷ Unidentified document from the Jean Charlot Collection entitled, "The Charlot/Horan Murals" the description states: Much of this information comes from a taped interview with Claude Horan recorded on October 1992." Folder 44. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

equipment and the bottom of the tile has the identifying text “St. Albert the Great Patron of Medical Technologists (fig. 40).” Charlot later recalled that he needed to conduct research on the various saints because he was not sure that he could find such appropriate scientific links with the saints.²⁶⁸ Beyond the tiles, works by Charlot at the St. Francis Hospital include a crucifix, made with bronze and wood, located in the chapel.

In addition to his work with Horan, Charlot collaborated with the Hawai‘i-based artist Evelyn Giddings, Charlot developed one of his most surprising and distinctive contribution to liturgical art on the campus of the Punahou School at the Robert Shipman Thurston Jr. Memorial Chapel designed by architect Vladimir Ossipoff (fig. 41).²⁶⁹ Founded in 1841, Punahou School was established by the missionaries of the American Board. The Hawaiian Monarchy chartered Punahou as a nonsecretarian school.²⁷⁰ The chapel was funded by the parents of Robert Shipman Thurston, Jr., a graduate of Punahou, who died as a result of military service.²⁷¹ The entrance doors that feature Charlot’s designs are made from koa wood and possess sculptured panels of copper repoussé completed by Giddings (fig. 42). The wood doors are striking in their appearance and make a formidable impression, though they fit harmoniously with the low-rising chapel that evokes a simplicity that is suited for the stunning natural environment of O‘ahu. The rich landscape of O‘ahu and generally speaking, the rest of the Islands, does not need elaborate architecture, as the topography offers substantive

²⁶⁸ *Art in the Collection of Saint Francis Hospital* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Saint Francis Hospital, 1982), 8.

²⁶⁹ Robert Shipman Thurston Jr. was a graduate from the school who died while serving in World War II. His parents paid for the chapel to be built and dedicated it to their son.

²⁷⁰ For more information on Ossipoff’s work see: *Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of the Arts in association with Yale University Press, 2007). Ossipoff was a noted architect on the Hawaiian Islands. Ossipoff designed many notable private homes included the O‘ahu residence of Clare Boothe Luce.

²⁷¹ Robert Shipman Thurston, Jr. died in 1945 when his military plane crashed over the Pacific Ocean.

decoration. Despite its location on a busy campus, the chapel exudes serenity. Signs posted at the entrances ask visitors to enter the chapel in silence and the left side of the chapel has minimal stained glass windows and the right side has a small koi fish pond both inside and outside of the chapel. Beyond these few examples, there is a lack of interior ornament as the altar is unassuming. The copper panels on the koa wood doors are certainly the standout features of the chapel, but even these works are understated. The details within the copper are clearly visible on close examination, but from far away they appear more abstract and blend well with the doors. The symmetry of the panels reinforces the minimalistic beauty of the chapel.

There are thirty-two panels for eight doors at the Punahou Chapel. Students at the school were asked to submit suggestions, based on biblical stories, for the panels on the doors. From these suggestions, Charlot chose ideas and then created his drawings, which he then passed along to Giddings. In explaining her process Giddings wrote, “Each line has been traced from Charlot’s drawings, then laid out upon the copper with carbon, then chased sometimes twice, then bumped and flattened again and again, and finally chased for finishing and detail. Over and over each line, around and under each form and figure, part of me is in it and it is very much in me. Hours spent for each panel, touching and contemplating.”²⁷² The process of completing the doors was detailed and as described by Giddings, laborious. Long after Charlot completed his drawings, Giddings continued to work panel by panel, and she would deliver the completed panels to the school in small groups. Though Charlot and Giddings worked on the project from December of 1967 to

²⁷² *Doors to Many Mansions*, with comments by Jean Charlot, Punahou School, Robert Shipman Thurston Jr. Memorial Chapel, 1973. last page.

November of 1971, the bulk of the length of the project was in the hands of Giddings.²⁷³ Beyond her working process, Giddings also addressed the spiritual impact of working on the Punahou project, “The stories and people are known and alive to me. It was more than labor to me. It was a living, loving touch with Charlot and Christ. I hope as the panels are touched and contemplated this spirit and inspiration will flow so I can share the fulfillment which has come to me through this work.”²⁷⁴ Like Charlot, the opportunity for Giddings to create religious art was more than a commission; it was a reflection of a personal spirituality. Furthermore, Giddings was not simply realizing Charlot’s vision for the panels; she had an active role in their development. Giddings wrote from Honolulu to Jean and Zohmah Charlot, who were spending time in France, “Before I sit down and play my old solitaire game with Christ’s life again I’ll react to your idea of putting the parables in circles. The doors are so very rectangular that I think just two random circles would be lost.”²⁷⁵ Giddings convinced Charlot to forgo the *tondo* design for the Punahou commission and to make a design that paralleled the angular shape of the doors. Like Charlot, Giddings possessed a personal affinity for liturgical work and a commitment to public art.²⁷⁶

Viewing Charlot’s drawings in concert with Giddings panels reveals her skill at realizing Charlot’s vision, but also her ability to manipulate the copper to create dynamic surfaces. On occasion there is much more detail in Charlot’s drawing than in the copper,

²⁷³ The chapel was dedicated on December 16, 1973.

²⁷⁴ *Doors to Many Mansions*, last page.

²⁷⁵ Evelyn Giddings to Jean and Zohmah Charlot, 6 September 1968, Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²⁷⁶ Giddings produced enamel murals for Lunalilo Elementary School in Honolulu; Lihikai Elementary School in Kahului; Kaimiloa Elementary School in Ewe Beach; and Eleele Elementary School in Eleele. She assisted Charlot on his frescoes for Leeward Community College in Pearl City and for the First Hawaiian Bank in Waikiki Beach, Honolulu.

but the lack of certain details gives the works a more modern sensibility. Two dramatic scenes illustrated on the doors were titled by Charlot, *Betrayal* and *Denial of Peter* (figs.43–6). *Betrayal*, of course, portrays a biblical scene very much a part of popular lore: Judas kissing Christ. In *Denial of Peter*, the apostle is sent away from the fire by a woman who holds a light up to identify him. Expelled from the scene, Peter will have to fend for himself in the darkness of night. The drama of both panels is only revealed on close examination as the intensity of their narratives is nearly muted by the serenity of the Punahou Chapel.

The small island of Kaua‘i boasts three tremendous projects by Charlot located within short distances from one another. All three churches with Charlot’s work are a part of St. Catherine’s Parish and therefore, it seems fitting to talk about them together. Charlot completed the three projects without receiving pay—they were donated to the people of each congregation.²⁷⁷ The three churches in Kaua‘i with works by Charlot—St. Catherine, St. Sylvester, and St. William—are typical of the types of religious spaces in which he worked, as they are understated in their architectural presentation and without ornate decoration in their interiors.

Charlot was not drawn to ornate decorations or cluttered altars. Instead he admired Protestant spaces in the United States and praised them for their subdued aesthetic that had long been embraced by Protestants and that was increasingly accepted by Catholics in the second half of the twentieth century. Often the Catholic churches in which he worked presented the same simplicity and sensibility. Furthermore, each church is surrounded by the natural beauty of Kaua‘i. In particular, St. William’s, located not far

²⁷⁷ John Charlot (Professor of Religion, University of Hawai‘i, and the artist’s son), in discussion with the author, June 2011.

from the storied Hanalei Bay, has mountains in the distance and a striking tree-lined street that leads up to it. These churches were created with thought about their proximity to natural beauty utilizing modern architecture; despite their connection to the Catholic faith, again, they evoke a more Protestant sensibility, the very same sensibility that Charlot favored where church decoration was concerned.

The business of the Living Church is with the living. To answer its function, a church building should achieve between today's American parishioner and its architecture, its statues and pictures, a moving affinity not unlike the one that, in Europe, has existed for centuries between the faithful and his material church, be it a cathedral or a crossroad chapel. The point is not at all that Americans should compete with Chartres on its own terms, but rather that our churches should fit the requirements of New World Catholics as successfully as Chartres answered the need of its own people in a very different time and place.²⁷⁸

Charlot emphasized that the American church has the opportunity to be something different from its counterpart in Europe. Furthermore, for Charlot the work was more about the practice of faith and inspiring community involvement than purely aesthetic attributes. No evidence exists to support the idea that Charlot was dogmatic. Charlot's son John wrote about his father, "Although he never practiced a religion other than Christianity, I believe he became increasingly open to primary religion throughout his life. In Mexico, he declined an invitation to participate in a Maya religious ceremony; in Hawai'i, his art focused on Hawaiian religious themes and experiences. Perhaps advancing age strengthened his self-assurance."²⁷⁹ He did not follow the letter of the law in relation to the Church; he interpreted Catholicism in a way that suited his lifestyle and his interests, a choice that parallels his approach to Mexican muralism. Charlot took inspiration from the Mexican muralism born in Mexico City in the 1920s and

²⁷⁸ Jean Charlot, "Catholic Art in America: Debts and Credits," *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*. Volume I. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1972), 260–62.

²⁷⁹ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.2 Sensitivity and Views."

transformed the artistic movement to meet his needs. In the same way in which his attitude toward religion became more open, his artistic sensibility also became more expansive as he increasingly embraced abstraction and continued to refine his forms and figures so that minimalism prevailed as opposed to the application of ornate detail.

St. Catherine's Church, the largest church in the parish and located in the town of Kapa'a, the most populated town on the island of Kaua'i, possesses Charlot's fresco, *The Compassionate Christ* and predominantly gray and yellow tiles that represent the Stations of the Cross (figs.47–8). *The Compassionate Christ* was completed from January 27 to February 3, 1958. In addition to Charlot's works, several of his colleagues created work for the church. The other works at St. Catherine's are *The Hawaiian Madonna–Ho'okupu* by Juliette May Fraser, which combines the traditional nativity scene with the tradition of Hawaiian gift-giving, and Tseng Yu Ho's *Francis Xavier Apostle of Asia*, which employs traditional Chinese brushwork.²⁸⁰

Compassionate Christ has a more dramatic setting than the other works by Charlot on Kaua'i in the sense that a distance of 127 feet lies between the entrance of St. Catherine's to the fresco behind the altar. The length of the nave lends a dramatic feel and evokes a sense of pageantry to the experience of walking into the church and seeing the dynamic fresco in the distance. Given that Charlot often worked in modern churches, and certainly St. Catherine's exterior suggests a modern space, the traditional nave and the placement of Charlot's work directly behind the altar results in a more customary viewing experience than is to be found in the other churches on Kaua'i and in the

²⁸⁰ As mentioned earlier, Juliette May Fraser was a close associate of Charlot's. She was born in Honolulu, and she studied at the Art Students League, New York. Tseng Yu Ho was born in Peking, China and she came to Honolulu in 1948 with Gustave Ecke (1896–1971), a scholar of Chinese art. She is known for her ability to create Chinese brush art in the ancient tradition.

Hawaiian Islands in general. A preparatory drawing for one of the angels that flanks the central, angular Christ figure demonstrates the artist's earliest preparations for the project (fig. 49). Charlot's son John shared a room with his father during the production of *Compassionate Christ* commission in Kaua'i and helped him with the mural.

All three churches within the parish, St. Catherine, St. Sylvester, and St. William, have Stations of the Cross by Charlot. Charlot recognized a connection between his mural process and the production of the Stations.²⁸¹ In representing the fourteen Stations, Charlot relied on a narrative structure and needed to consider placement of the works within the larger context of the church with specific consideration of the architecture of the space as well. Charlot assigned descriptive titles to his representations of the Stations, but he adapted them according to the way in which he chose to represent the scene.²⁸² As with many of Charlot's religious commissions, the artist sought not only a modern representation, but also his own distinct interpretation of the scripture.

The fourteen fresco panels at St. Sylvester fit somewhat awkwardly into their niches above the altar (fig. 50). The church space was not designed with Charlot's fresco panels in mind as they were added later. Although the works are an odd fit, they are in a place of honor, above and surrounding the main altar. The perimeter walls of the church, another possible location for the works, would have been a tight fit for the works as well. Here at St Sylvester's the spiritual use of the works is more important than a precise installation. These works possess that light, almost pastel palette that Charlot favored increasingly in his work, specifically those works on Hawai'i. Additionally, the pigments

²⁸¹ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, Introductory text. Jean Charlot Collection.

²⁸² Ibid.

of his frescoes gradually become lighter over time. Charlot also preferred the mat finish of fresco work. With these smaller Stations that are more akin to the size of oil paintings, some of the predilections of the artist are readily apparent.²⁸³

The set of Stations for St. William's was the culmination of Charlot's move toward a more minimal liturgical art. In 1955, he created a series of prints that were the beginning of a shift in his work in which he embraced a monochromatic and even more simplified representation of the Stations.²⁸⁴ These particular prints were not preparatory works for a larger, more public project, but they mark a shift in his career and share in form much similarity with the works at St. William's.

The pillars inside of St. William's were originally a brown, wood stained surface. Today they are painted white and they parallel the mostly white Stations of the Cross within the church (fig. 51). The domination of the color white makes the interior space appear more in harmony with the works of Charlot than it had previously, and there is an emphasis on the sparseness of the church. The tile works of the Stations feature figures outlined in brown that present the Passion sparsely. Station 13, which symbolizes the moment in which the body of Jesus was removed from the cross, demonstrates the pared down compositions common throughout this particular version of the Charlot's Stations of the Cross (fig. 52). "With his constant reinterpretation of these images from the heart of Christian art, he sought a spiritual dimension through clarity of expression achieved by progressive simplification, eliminating all but the main figures and essential details. His stations always reflected his respect for composition, honest materials and craftsmanship,

²⁸⁴ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, Case 3. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

attention to function, and a style appropriate to each place and to his time.”²⁸⁵ The spare nature of the Stations reflects a humble attitude toward the narrative of Christ. They allow the viewer to focus on the story as opposed to being distracted by ornament. Furthermore, as the church is located amidst a beautiful natural setting on the island of Kauai‘i, the simple materials used to construct the building allow for the focus on the environment and the religious experience taking place within the church. In addition to the Stations inside the church, Charlot made the sculpture that hangs on the façade of the church, a Sacred Heart (fig. 53).²⁸⁶ The sculptural piece, also a donation to the congregation, was installed on December 23, 1969. The angular and block-like quality of Christ’s face and body reflect Charlot’s distinctive style that had been with him since his first Stations of the Cross in Paris and was later augmented in his work in Mexico and the United States. Though his sculpture is not a major part of his *oeuvre* and scholars have for the most part ignored this aspect of his work, this Sacred Heart belongs to the larger trajectory of the artist’s sculptural work from his early wood reliefs at the end of World War I, like the one referenced in Chapter II, to his bronze crucifixes, and his later sculptures such as *Mary our Mother*, installed at Maryknoll Elementary in Honolulu in September of 1979 and *Damien*, installed at St. Anthony’s Church in Wailuku, Maui in July of 1980, after the artist’s death.

Like Charlot’s Stations at St. William’s, the Stations of the Cross at St. Mark’s in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, the only Anglo-Catholic church on the islands of Hawai‘i, appear minimal in form (fig. 54) and are realized on blue and buff tiles. The church was

²⁸⁵ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, Introductory text. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²⁸⁶ This particularly iconography was important to Charlot. His home that he helped design in Honolulu has a tile Sacred Heart Jesus next to the front of the door.

dedicated in 1951 and the exterior is distinctive with its approximately 15,000 bricks that were made by parishioners. Originally planned to be St. Stephen's Church, St. Mark's was the chosen name because Queen Emma had died on the day designated for St. Mark.²⁸⁷ The name change was meant to appeal to the members of Hawaiian ancestry.

The opportunity to view the Stations of the Cross at this particular church currently presents a very contemporary juxtaposition. Rather ironically, a taco shop has opened next door to the church with brightly painted graffiti murals on its exterior; the type of work that is popular in Southern California. A small side street separates the tile Stations of the Cross created by Charlot from the type of contemporary work that would never have evolved without the great interest in the United States in murals created in the first half of twentieth-century Mexico.

C. Other Religious Connections

After having examined his major liturgical projects in the Midwest, where his two most prominent projects were for the Benedictine Abbey in Atchison, Kansas, and Our Lady of Sorrows in Farmington, Michigan, and major religious works on the islands of Hawai'i (the region where his religious works are the most concentrated), I will now address other manifestations and turning points in his liturgical art career from exhibitions to friendships, and the creation of ephemera.

During 1938, John Levy Galleries in New York had three separate exhibitions of Charlot's work.²⁸⁸ For the most part, the exhibitions were organized chronologically and

²⁸⁷ Queen Emma (1836–1885) was married to King Kamehameha IV (1834–1863). She was committed to many humanitarian causes and she encouraged the foundation of the Anglican Church in Hawai'i.

²⁸⁸ Located at 1 East 57th Street, John Levy Gallery (where Charlot showed his work) is often confused with the better-known space Julian Levy Gallery.

separated by the following years, 1927–30, 1930–33, and 1933–36. The exhibitions received positive press, “As far as design, drawing, color, and conception are concerned—and after all, they are the primary artistic objectives—Charlot is in a class by himself.”²⁸⁹ Each show included pieces that were completed after his employment with the Carnegie Institution and during his early years in New York. The last of the three exhibitions included traditional work like a still-life and his recognized renderings of Mexican culture. But, the show also highlighted his religious art. The plum-colored walls at the gallery offered a dramatic backdrop for Charlot’s religious works that were formally exhibited for the first time.²⁹⁰ A reviewer of the exhibition described the show as follows: “Charlot’s religious panels—six depicting Christian mysteries of the rosary—are both from the standpoint of perfectly fused intellectuality and feeling and from the difficulties of design the most wonderful things he has done. The difficulties of design, indeed, have been made to seem of small account.”²⁹¹ The issue of design is the use of the *tondo* to encapsulate the subject matter. The edges of Charlot’s *tondos* are nearly stretched to the edges of the canvas.

As was addressed previously, Charlot made numerous significant acquaintances and deep friendships throughout his life that informed his thinking and his creative production. In fact, many of the friendships he made that further connected his religious practice and his art led to subsequent commissions and future artistic inspiration. Among these important relationships were his longstanding personal and professional relationship with Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward, a married couple who founded Sheed

²⁸⁹ James W. Lane, “Current Exhibitions,” *Parnassus* 8, no.3 (1936): 26.

²⁹⁰ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and The Way of the Cross*, Case 2. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²⁹¹ Lane, 27.

and Ward, a religious publishing house in London in 1926. The New York branch of their company was established in 1933. As a company, Sheed and Ward aimed to bring religious literature to the broadest possible audience. *Sheed and Ward's own Trumpet* was a newsletter that advertised the publications produced by the publishing house. Charlot began working for Sheed and Ward in 1938 and for the next thirty years he produced illustrations for the catalogue, books, and book covers. The newsletter provided a list of books that Sheed and Ward expected to publish from the following September to November. The list was accompanied by a joyous picture of the Charlot family—both Jean and Zohmah are depicted along with all four of their children. The list of books included the title and description: “Essays on Art by Jean Charlot, with much illustration. (Now you can find out why he draws like that).” Here, the writers of the newsletter acknowledged that some found Charlot’s cartoons and illustrations to be unusual and radical in contrast to the more traditional representations the readers knew well. In reviewing their working relationship, Sheed remembered, “Being ourselves meant being Maisie and me and Jean Charlot and Marigold Hunt, who wrote the back page of the *Trumpet* for the twenty-five years of its existence. A reader probably had all four of us in mind when he wrote, ‘I find Sheed & Ward’s publicity hard to take. It reminds me of an elderly nun on sherry trifle...’²⁹² With these playful words, Ward reveals his sense of humor, the fun collaborative aspect of their working relationship, and the fact that the group collectively pursued their work from a point of view that differed from their “sober” predecessors.

²⁹² Frank Sheed, “Aiming a Little above the Middle of the Brow: Frank Sheed on the Travails of a Catholic Publisher,” *Publisher's Weekly* (September 9, 1974):36.

Sheed has been described as a writer, publisher, lecturer, street-corner orator, and one of twentieth century's most important Catholic spokesmen.²⁹³ He was neither an academic nor a philosopher, but an individual who cared very much about bringing religious writing to a wide audience. In addition to the works he published by others, he wrote some twenty books, including his memoir, *The Church & I*, published in 1974. Charlot and Sheed shared in common a desire to connect with real people through vernacular words (Sheed) and art (Charlot). Sheed wrote about Charlot, "Art meant everything to him. It meant considerably less that to me—Charlot's art, anybody's. Only now and again did I admire his major painting. There would have been no point in pretending. I remember telling him that Mozart had walked through the Louvre, not looking at the great paintings. Charlot's comment was silence. I think he did not hold it against me that in this area I was blind."²⁹⁴ Despite their strong working relationship, Sheed and Charlot had vastly different approaches to visual art. They shared Catholicism, but Charlot's passion for visual arts was not matched in Sheed's outlook by his own estimation. For Charlot, the visual arts were an extension of his own faith. In the case of Sheed, his publishing company and his own writings were deeply connected to his religious practice.

Another significant relationship for Charlot was his friendship with Dorothy Day whom he met during the 1930s in New York. To clarify, this Dorothy Day is not the same Dorothy Day (later Zohmah Day Charlot) who was the artist's wife. Day was born into a family of journalists and followed in their footsteps by covering radical causes and

²⁹³ Ibid, 35.

²⁹⁴ "Jean Charlot: Remembered by Frank Sheed" Undated document. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

conducting interviews with leftist leaders. In 1932, while participating in a march for workers in Washington D.C., Day noticed there were no members of the clergy in attendance.²⁹⁵ As a part of her desire to combine her activism and her religious life, Day established *The Catholic Worker*, a publication that premiered first on May Day of 1933.²⁹⁶ The premiere issue focused on child labor laws, the working conditions of women in textile factories, injustices experienced by African Americans, and summaries of recent strikes.²⁹⁷ Interestingly, Charlot avoided many of these issues in his art and when he addressed them directly, it was infrequent. Charlot respected Day for her commitment to leftist causes, and he gave permission for a series of his Stations of the Cross works to be reprinted in her publication *The Catholic Worker*. By publishing his art in Day's periodical, Charlot's work was linked to Day, the most famous American Catholic in the 1930s and perhaps the most important American Catholic dedicated to social justice during the twentieth century. From the very first issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Day sought to link the experiences of the worker with the lessons of the Catholic Church.²⁹⁸ The presence of Charlot's Stations in *The Catholic Worker* reinforced Day's commitment to Christian traditions. Charlot's works for Day's journal sparked criticism. In the May edition of the publication a reader wrote to the editor page, "Dear Miss Day: Re: the discussion on Jean Charlot's Stations of the Cross. Suffering brings hideousness, indignity; it is terrible to look at—for it is a negation."²⁹⁹ This assessment confirmed that the public was not always ready for Charlot's version of the Passion.

²⁹⁵ Sheila Webb, "Dorothy Day and the Early Years of the 'Catholic Worker': Social Action through the Pages of the Press," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no.3 (Summer 2003):74.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁹⁹ *The Catholic Worker*, May 1936 Editorial Page, "Jean Charlot" no page. Jean Charlot Collection.

Charlot's relationships with Sheed and Day were formed after he left Mexico and while he was living in New York. While Sheed was a less traditional friend than one might think for Charlot, the Frenchman with a customary education and vast experience in artistic practice and knowledge of art history, their dedication to Catholicism brought them together. Another important religiously motivated friendship for Charlot was his bond with Father Couturier. Unlike Sheed, Couturier was a great champion of religious art and saw the value in engaging well-known artists like Fernand Léger (1881–1955) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954) in the creation of works for religious spaces. His correspondence with Matisse is well documented, but Couturier also exchanged letters with Charlot. Concerning the practice of creating spiritually motivated art, Couturier wrote, "No one style should then be called specifically religious, perhaps rather ten thousand styles. The essential of true religious art is a simpler and deeper thing, a thing also more exacting, a given spiritual sensitiveness concerned with beings, objects and lifes."³⁰⁰ In his quest to combine his dual interests in religion and art, Couturier struggled to define religious art in a precise and objective way. With his eloquent words cited above, he recognized that great religious art was an intangible concept.

As a result of their friendship and mutual respect, Couturier contributed a short essay for a pamphlet that accompanied a 1940 exhibition of Charlot's religious paintings in New York. Couturier wrote,

If one gets acquainted with Jean Charlot, one finds that, with a plastic akin to that of Breton calvaries or of Mayan sculptures, he simply states what he is, what he loves and what he believes. Each station of his Way of the Cross composes with shape and color a song whose notes remain pure and faithful. People may feel

³⁰⁰ Fr. M.A. Couturier O.P., "Untitled Short Essay for Exhibition Pamphlet." *Jean Charlot: Religious Paintings*. Bonestell Gallery. December 19, 1940 to January 11, 1941. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

disconcerted by the contrasts, the harshness of its impacted or broken volumes, the levity of its saturated colors, this mingling of violence and buffoonery. But lest you be mistaken, the apple cheeks and chubby curves of his heroic bambinos illustrate with tenderness all that, in the eyes of God, remains childlike even in the most cruel of our human dramas—or again, all that is hidden of pity and tears behind the joy and laughter of average Christian life.

Couturier expressed an affinity for Charlot's economy in his use of line and that in his portrayal of children, he related the innocence and pleasure of daily life. In addition to a series of works portraying the Stations of the Cross, the exhibition included works representing the flight into Egypt, the rest on the flight, and the deposition. Portraits of St. Ann, St. Veronica, and Father Couturier were a part of the show as well.

D. The Resonance of His Earlier Religious Prints

Printmaking was an early interest for Charlot. Charlot's very first print, *Head of Christ*, was created in Paris in 1916 and not surprisingly, the small woodcut portrays a religious subject. In this work, the artist depicts Christ's face turned downward. Light emanates behind Christ's head and shoulders reinforcing the divine nature of the work. When asked years later about this print, Charlot remembered that he created the work because he wanted to have something to sell.³⁰¹ Thinking practically, he convinced a local art dealer to display the print in his shop window, but unfortunately for the budding artist (and salesman) no one bought the piece.

A series of prints from 1918 portraying the fourteen Stations of the Cross represent Charlot's first major series of works. Charlot depicted the Stations of the Cross from 1918 to 1971, and he made at least fifteen versions of the Stations of the Cross, including seven murals. Charlot's interest in popular art was formed in France. Charlot

³⁰¹ Morse, 3.

produced many prints, but he explored his interest in printmaking both before and after his time in Mexico and he developed his own commitment to printmaking outside of the modern print movement in Mexico. Over the course of his career, he made 772 prints and fifty-eight were created during the last four years of his life. Not counting the prints he produced for events, Charlot created approximately forty prints inspired by Catholicism.

Undoubtedly, the prints depicting the Stations of the Cross, his first important body of work, demonstrate the early influence of Catholicism in the artist's life. The works present bold, angular lines that reinforce a modern presentation. One of the prints includes a small self-portrait of the artist (fig. 55). Despite their twentieth-century visual forms, the works were steeped in liturgical and art history. By creating physical stations, liturgical artists provided the faithful with an opportunity to replicate the pilgrimage undertaken by people who traveled to the Holy Land and retraced the steps of Jesus. The journey of Jesus on the road to Calvary and his Crucifixion, typically represented in either sculpted and painted forms have become a fixture in many Catholic churches since the Middle Ages. The Stations have been represented in myriad ways and perhaps most commonly through the installation of wooden crosses. In other instances, representations of places in Jerusalem or figural depictions of the various scenes are also common. Charlot collected representations of the Passion including a book of Albrecht Dürer's stations.³⁰² For Charlot, telling the story of the Passion involved focusing on the principal players, namely Christ and Mary, without attention to the crowds and soldiers described in the Bible. The solemnity of such a narrative is well-paired with Charlot's spare modern style.

³⁰² Albrecht Dürer. *Kleine Passion* (Leipzig: L. Zehl's, 1887).

The triumph of the original Stations of the Cross prints from 1920 lies not only in their demonstration of keen artistic skill. Charlot's ability to preserve the wooden planks and carry them while serving in World War I and later taking him to Mexico was a tremendous feat. The actual works continued to have resonance and therefore in 1977, Charlot reprinted the series, with the help of Lynton Kistler, who was able to work with the damaged wood planks that had survived for 57 years. One of the versions of the reprints hangs in the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Rock Hill, South Carolina (fig. 56). This oratory is the largest of the four in the United States, and today it is located in the center of the expanding community of Rock Hill.

Like other religious mural commissions (most notably the St. Catherine's Church in Kaua'i), the oratory includes a Station of the Cross by Charlot and a mural. The Rock Hill fresco, *Christ as the Vine, with Saints*, 1959, presents Christ on the cross at the center of the composition (fig. 57). Charlot completed a few commissions in the Southern region of the United States, although this fresco presents most clearly his connection to spirituality.³⁰³ The vines which grow fruitfully in the composition make the mural very distinctive in its representation of foliage. Though Charlot often depicted the natural surroundings, his murals were typically devoid of overt references to nature and instead focused on the religious figures. Other figures represented in the mural are the Virgin Mary, St. Philip of Neri, and two well-regarded Oratorians, Cardinal Baronius and Cardinal John Henry Newman. Baronius was one of the first disciples to become a loyal follower of St. Philip of Neri, and he is acknowledged as the "Father of Church History."

³⁰³ Charlot's secular murals in Georgia discussed in Chapter II were his most important works completed in the South. The commission for the Oratory was his only religious mural created in the Southern region of the U.S.

Newman, the founder of the English Oratory, kneels in prayer and is portrayed next to the Virgin Mary. Charlot occasionally included dogs in his compositions and in this mural he painted a portrait of the Neri's dog, Capriccio.³⁰⁴

E. Cartoons, Cards, and Posters: The Religious Ephemera of Charlot

In addition to his more formal religious prints and his murals for religious spaces, Charlot drew many religious cartoons for newspapers like the *Catholic Missourian* and the *South Colorado Register* (figs.58). In 1978 Sheed and Charlot collaborated on a book of cartoons, *Cartoons Catholic: Mirth and Meditation from the Brush and Brain of Jean Charlot with commentary by F. J. Sheed*.³⁰⁵ This book features a number of cartoons placed in a set order to collectively tell a story of salvation. The process for his books involved Charlot first drawing the cartoons with Sheed subsequently providing captions. This was opposite to the way in which they typically worked as Charlot often was charged with making a cartoon to go along with an article written by Sheed.

The immediacy of Charlot's cartoons was also present in his family's annual holiday tradition. Ever the archivist, Zohmah Charlot saved both the Christmas cards that Charlot made each year and the cards that they received from their friends and family all over the world. The cards were drawn with simplicity and possessed strong, bold lines. After reviewing the cards that were created over some thirty years three stand out from the rest. First, a stained glass window holiday card recalls the Mexican folk art tradition of *papel picado* (fig. 59). Furthermore, the presentation of a stained glass form suggests

³⁰⁴ Charlot received 5,000 dollars to complete the fresco, though the amount may seem modest for his efforts, at the time it was a great deal for the Oratory.

³⁰⁵ F. J. Sheed, *Cartoons Catholic: Mirth and Meditation from the Brush and Brain of Jean Charlot* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1978).

Charlot's commissions for church spaces and makes a reference to a medium that is a major part of religious art. Second, a card of Charlot working on a fresco of a Nativity scene reinforces the pride he had for his work (fig. 60).³⁰⁶ His representation of his profession on the family holiday card reinforces the central role that his mural-making played not only in his life, but also in the life of his family. Charlot's children occasionally traveled with him and worked as his assistants, in other circumstances, Charlot had to leave the family behind as he pursued mural commissions. Third, a card made for Dr. Leo Eloesser demonstrates the many personal connections Charlot explored through his annual holiday card (fig. 61). At a show at Ansel Adams Gallery, where few pictures sold (likely as a result of the harsh economic times), Dr. Leo Eloesser bought a painting by Charlot. Later, Charlot made a Christmas card for Eloesser with the same design that was found in his painting. Charlot was not Eloesser's only connection to Mexican modernism, Frida Kahlo also knew the doctor.³⁰⁷

It is fitting, given the lack of distinction that Charlot saw between high and low art, that Charlot was often willing to create ephemera for church-related activities. For the Newman Center at the University of Hawai'i he produced the annual luau posters (fig. 62). Charlot had become the faculty adviser to the Newman Club at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 1950. The posters retained a consistent composition in which an angel was typically represented with a pig at the center of the work. Variations in color and the position of the angel in the composition changed over the years. Charlot stated,

³⁰⁶ American painter Belle Baranceanu also created Christmas cards in the 1930s and 1940s that share much in common with Charlot's cards due to their bold, angular, and minimal lines. Given Baranceanu's participation in the mural movement in the U.S., Charlot was likely aware of her work.

³⁰⁷ Frida Kahlo created a portrait of the doctor in 1931. Eloesser was a noted thoracic surgeon who expressed concern for healthcare in rural areas and among the poor. Eloesser famously treated Kahlo during her stay in San Francisco and the doctor and artist remained in close contact until Kahlo's death.

“Well, I love to work for nonartists. I think that the business of the artists is really to work for nonartists, and I am always a little doubtful of people who know all about art. First, they never know all about it, they just think they do.”³⁰⁸ Charlot was democratic in his approach to art-making; most of all he wanted people to engage with his art and he did not object to making work that lacked grand significance.

Just as Charlot was willing to illustrate ephemera for religious events, he often agreed to have his works used for a variety of purposes. The artist did not hold back images of his works for high-profile publications with national audiences or journals that were only circulated among academics. Instead he was willing to let his works appear in more popular and occasionally spiritually-focused publications. For example a depiction of the ninth Station, similar in form to his work for St. William’s Church on the island of Kaua‘i, accompanies Joe Breig’s short essay, “The Stations of the Cross: The Ninth Station” in the October 1956 issue of *Crosier Missionary*, published in Onamia, Minnesota. The ninth Station portrays the third fall of Jesus. Like many of Charlot’s illustrations, and in particular his representations of the Stations of the Cross, the work appears minimal in form, focusing on the figure and the act without the distraction of ornate detail. Another popular representation of Charlot’s Stations of the Cross occurred in the April 1957 addition of *Today: National Catholic Magazine*. In this publication each Station was accompanied by two quotations, one would be a psalm from the Bible and the other would be a religious quotation either from a historic writer or from a modern liturgical poet.

³⁰⁸ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

While this project mostly examines art created in the United States, one of Charlot's most important religious murals took place in the Fiji Islands at a remote church that was built in 1918. Charlot was sixty-five when he traveled with his wife Zohmah over the winter holidays to complete the commission. The mural cycle included three main panels situated behind the altar (fig. 63). The central panel portrays a Black Christ and the panels themselves are populated with local people that Charlot met and the dense foliage is reminiscent of the mural, *Tropical Foliage*, 1957, he created for his home in Honolulu and *Christ as the Vine, with Saints*, 1959, at the Oratory of St. Philip of Neri in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The three central panels are flanked by two additional panels of St. Joseph in his carpenter shop and the Annunciation.

As a result of a stopover in Kaua'i on the way to Fiji, Father Wasner became familiar with the parish of St. Catherine's parish. In fact, Wasner, the one-time preacher to the Von Trapp family of singers, spent a week saying daily mass at St. Catherine's, which was a newly inaugurated church at the time. Wasner was impressed with Charlot's work for the church, in particular the fresco, *Compassionate Christ* and decided to write the artist to see if he would be willing to create a work at his new post in Fiji. Wasner wrote, "When I took over my mission here in Fiji last October the uninspired inside decoration of my church here did the very opposite to me, it depressed me more and more with every day. Then the thought came to me to ask you to come here and do to this church what you did to St. Catherine's—give it a powerful accent and breathe some life into it."³⁰⁹ Wasner acknowledged that he knew Charlot had been generous in the donation of his work on Kaua'i and that the people of his community and the church itself in Fiji

³⁰⁹ Father Wasner to Jean Charlot. 7 February 1961. Jean Charlot Collection.

did not have enough funds to adequately pay Charlot. Peter Maurin (1877–1949), co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, once stated, “It is part of a pastor’s job to be with his people, to know something about their problems, and to follow them when they embark on a new venture, both to help out and to keep them out of trouble.”³¹⁰ In fact, in his letter of introduction, Wasner offers to use his own money to provide Charlot’s travel arrangements and also to buy the supplies for mural production. The possibility of Charlot’s work at the St. Francis Xavier excited Wasner so much that after Charlot’s arrival, he would wake up at 3 or 4 in the morning every day to conduct masonry work and prepare the wall for Charlot’s work later that day. Father Wasner’s commitment to the community in which he worked and the betterment of the church through Charlot’s artistry corresponded to the liberal ideas present among certain Catholic leaders and communities.

The liturgical side of Charlot’s life is not really fully understood as scholars have not only tended to focus on his time in Mexico, but also on his representation of indigenous populations. Charlot used his art to convey Catholic imagery and shared his own religiosity with a great number of people through the creation of liturgical art. In fact, Charlot embraced Catholicism even more in the later years of his life by attending mass every day, and following the liturgical calendar became a central part of his life. The events of the liturgical calendar inspired more than 450 paintings, murals, and prints.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Schatz, 181.

³¹¹ Bronwen Solyom, *Image and Word: Jean Charlot and the Way of the Cross*. Jean Charlot Collection. Extended labels.

F. Conclusion

Charlot's work is well represented in numerous public institutions; however, much of the work there specifically documents Mexico as opposed to his liturgical art. While his archives and the largest collection of his work remains in Hawai'i, institutions like The San Diego Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Museum of Art, and the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago have important works by Charlot. Jack Lord, a friend of Charlot's from Hawai'i, purchased a large amount of Charlot's work and donated it to museums throughout the US.³¹² Lord, as an art collector and practicing visual artist, had the opportunity to meet the artist and learn directly from him about his work. Lord developed a great affinity for Charlot's work and promoted it through his donation of prints to various institutions. He donated fifty-one lithographs by Charlot ranging in date from 1918 to 1970 by Charlot, as well as a portfolio of 100 prints by one of Charlot's heroes, José Guadalupe Posada to the Smithsonian Museum. Another significant donation was given to the Hawaii State Library System by Lord and his wife Marie. The donation included a number of copies of Charlot's *Picture Book II* and enough lithographs of two works, *Women Standing*, *Child on Back*, 1933, and *Hawaiian Swimmer*, 1959, so that each public library could have one. Charlot's work found resonance among diverse collectors and spaces, though in terms of liturgical art, much of that artistic production remains at the churches where he created projects of a monumental scale. His work of Hawaiian and Mexican cultures was embraced by collectors like Lord, but across all of his work a connection to people and daily experience was explored. Charlot's work possesses an easily accessible narrative

³¹² A noted actor, Jack Lord starred on the television program, "Hawaii Five-O."

approach and an ability to appeal to wide audiences, as seen throughout the previous two chapters.

Another point that was reiterated throughout Chapter II and Chapter III was that the people whom Charlot met and with whom he corresponded—American artists in Mexico from Pablo O’Higgins to Everett Gee Jackson, and Father Couturier and Frank Sheed in relation to his spiritual work—had a tremendous impact on his artistic production. Furthermore, Charlot’s work does not exist within a vacuum, and other artists, notably Ramos Martínez, shared points of similarity in its trajectory, particularly in terms of his artistic transformation in the US and connection to religious art. Though Charlot’s artistic production is vaster and the extant documentation of his work more thorough, Ramos Martínez’s life and work provide an interesting point of study in relation to Charlot. The following chapters examine Ramos Martínez’s work in depth and place his art in context with the work of Charlot.

Charlot’s personal relationships with the staff at the sites where he completed murals are well documented. On February 17, 1956, George Garretts of the Newman Center on the campus of the University of Minnesota wrote to Charlot and suggested a series of topics for an upcoming article for the University’s Annual to be written by Charlot.³¹³ The proposed topics ranged from Diego Rivera to the role of liturgical art. Garrett closed the letter with the following line, “We have enjoyed having you very much. Will try to get more information for you on the Infant of Prague. In the mean time [sic]...God send you some walls.”³¹⁴ Charlot’s professional life and his spiritual life were

³¹³ Charlot created tile works collectively entitled *Way of the Resurrection*, c. 1958 for the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota that were stolen and have never been recovered.

³¹⁴ George Garretts to Jean Charlot, 17 February 1956, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

intertwined, and this innate relationship was recognized by those who lived with his murals.

According to his wishes, after his death, Charlot was laid out in a Benedictine habit. Sometime after completing the murals in Atchison, Kansas, he became an oblate or a nonvowed associate member of the Abbey.³¹⁵ Ironically, Charlot died on March 20, the eve of the anniversary of St. Benedict. Until the end of his life, Charlot continued to create religious art. One of his last frescoes, a commission secured by the artist's son John, was for the Maryknoll Elementary School, located near the campus of the University of Hawai'i and the Charlot family home in Honolulu (fig. 64). Entitled *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*, 1978, Charlot painted the lower portion of the mural from his wheelchair and his son Martin was his assistant.

Charlot always viewed himself as a muralist. His murals and his many versions of the Stations of the Cross are the most consistent and important part of his work, but they are rarely studied. Liturgical art created during the twentieth century has been viewed outside of the avant-garde practice of modern art and has been considered insignificant. Charlot was a liturgical artist far longer than he was a muralist in Mexico, but much more emphasis has been placed on the artist's time in Mexico. This project reverses the typical analysis of Charlot's work by focusing on the manifestations of his religious influences.

³¹⁵ Regis F. Hickey, "Charlot: Loved Man of Art," *yb* 5, no.1 (February 1995): 5.



Fig. 27. Jean Charlot, Tropical Foliage, 1957
Inside Charlot's family home, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 28. Jean Charlot, Sacred Heart, c. 1960
Charlot's family home, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Ceramic tile, 17 x 8 1/2 inches
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 29. Interior of St. Cyprian's, River Grove, Illinois, date unknown
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
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Fig. 30. Jean Charlot, Station 6, Veronica wipes the face of Jesus, 1935–37
Oil on canvas, 3 x 3 feet
St. Cyprian's, River Grove, Illinois
Photograph by Robert Sherer
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 31. Jean Charlot, Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life, 1959

Fresco, 21 x 29 feet

Benedictine Abbey, Atchison, Kansas

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

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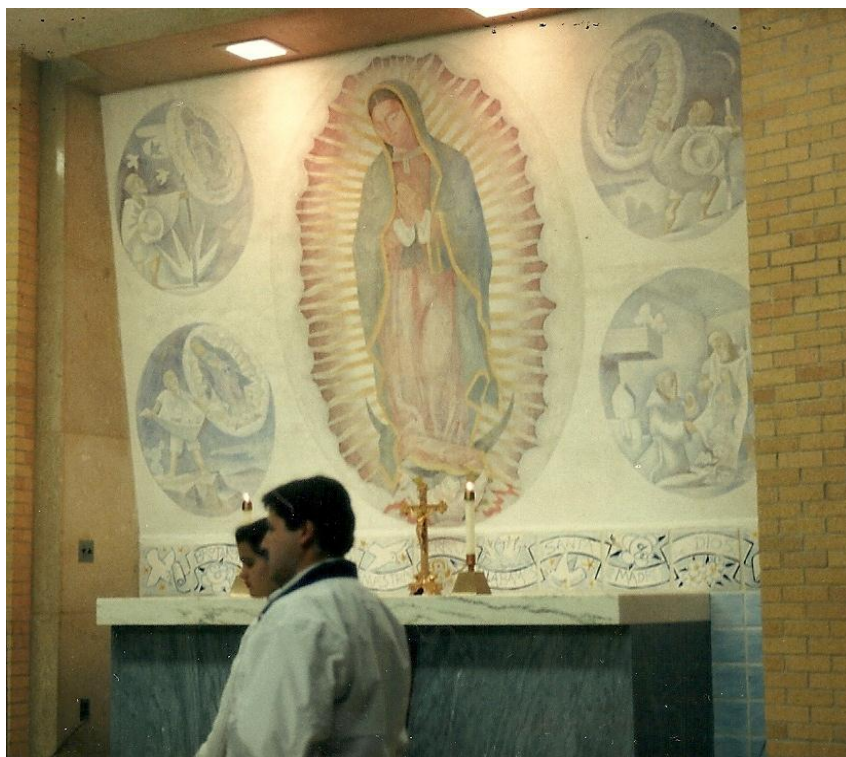


Fig. 32. Jean Charlot, Virgin of Guadalupe, 1959
Benedictine Abbey, Atchison, Kansas
Fresco, 9 3/4 x 12 feet
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
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Fig. 33. Helen Rand Parish, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (New York: Viking, 1955)
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 34. Jean Charlot, *Trinity and Episodes of Benedictine Life*, 1958
Oil on canvas, 21 7/8 x 28 inches
Private Collection, courtesy of Toby Moss Gallery, Los Angeles, California
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 35. Jean Charlot, *Joseph's Carpenter Shop*, 1957

Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 1/8 inches

Collection of The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Pinney, III, 1985.87

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Fig. 36. Jean Charlot, *Our Lady of Sorrows and the Ascension of our Lord*, Farmington, Michigan, 1961

Fresco, 1,300 square feet

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

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Fig. 37. Jean Charlot, preparatory drawing for Our Lady of Sorrows and the Ascension of our Lord, Farmington, Michigan, 1961

Pencil on paper, 17 1/4 x 11 1/2 inches

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

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Fig. 38. Jean Charlot, Nativity at the Ranch, 1953

Kohala Ranch, Hawai'i

Fresco, 4 x 5 feet

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Photograph by Garrett Solyom

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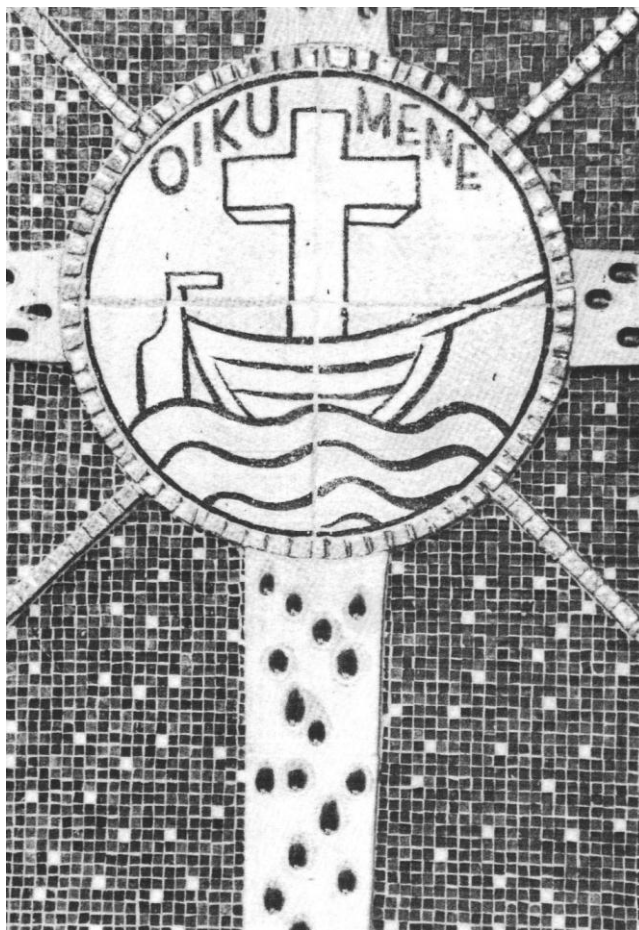


Fig. 39. Jean Charlot, Oikumene (in collaboration with Claude Horan), 1958

Ceramic tile, 4 1/2 x 3 1/2 feet

Kailua Methodist Church in Kailua, Hawai'i

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Fig. 40. Jean Charlot, St. Albert the Great
Patron of Medical Technologists, 1958
Ceramic tile, 4 x 1 feet
St. Francis Hospital, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author
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permission.



Fig. 41. Robert Shipman Thurston Jr. Memorial Chapel, Punahou School,
Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author



Fig. 42. A door at Robert Shipman Thurston Jr. Memorial Chapel, Punahou School, Honolulu, Hawai'i
8 of a total of 32 panels, 1 of 4 doors in total
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig.43. Evelyn Giddings, Betrayal, 1967–71
Copper repousse on koa wood door, 18 x 19 inches
Punahou Chapel, Honolulu, Hawai‘i
Photograph by author
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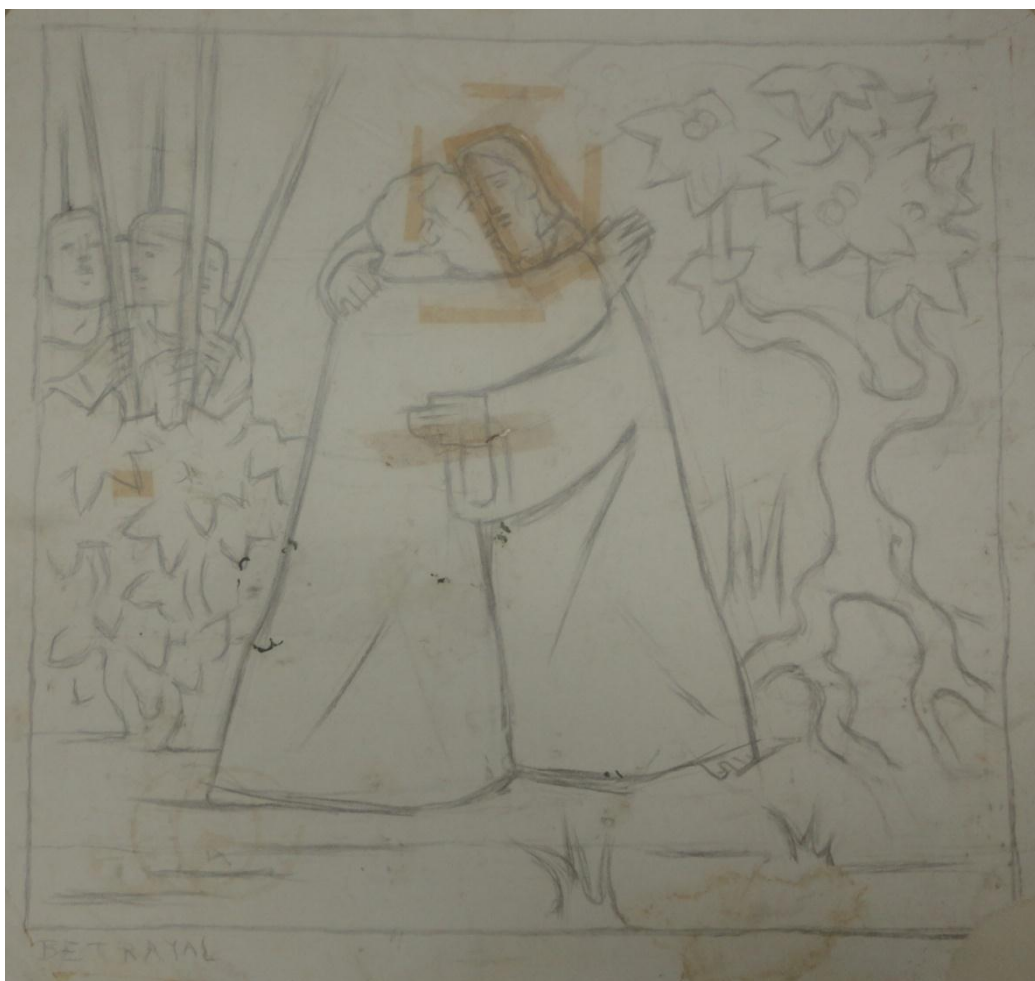


Fig. 44. Jean Charlot, Drawing for Betrayal, 1967

Pencil and marker on paper, 19 1/2 x 29 inches

Charlot Collection Punahou Chapel, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

Property of Jean Charlot

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 45. Evelyn Giddings, Denial of Peter, 1967–71
Copper repousse on koa wood door, 18 x 19 inches
Punahou Chapel, Honolulu, Hawai‘i
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

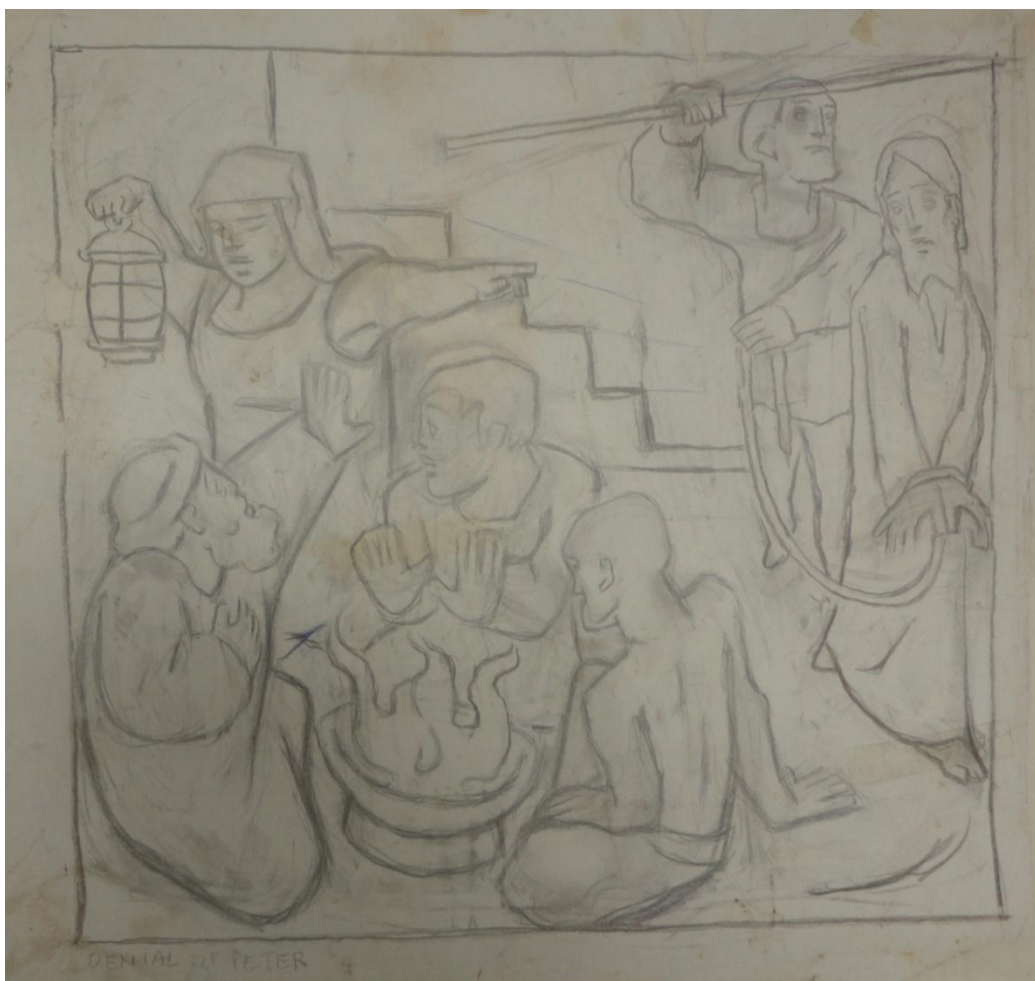


Fig. 46. Jean Charlot, Drawing for Denial of Peter, 1967

Pencil on paper, 19 1/2 x 29 inches

Punahou Chapel, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by the author

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

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Fig. 47. Jean Charlot, *Compassionate Christ*, 1958
St. Catherine's Church, Kapa'a, Kaua'i, Hawai'i
Fresco, 10 x 7 feet
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

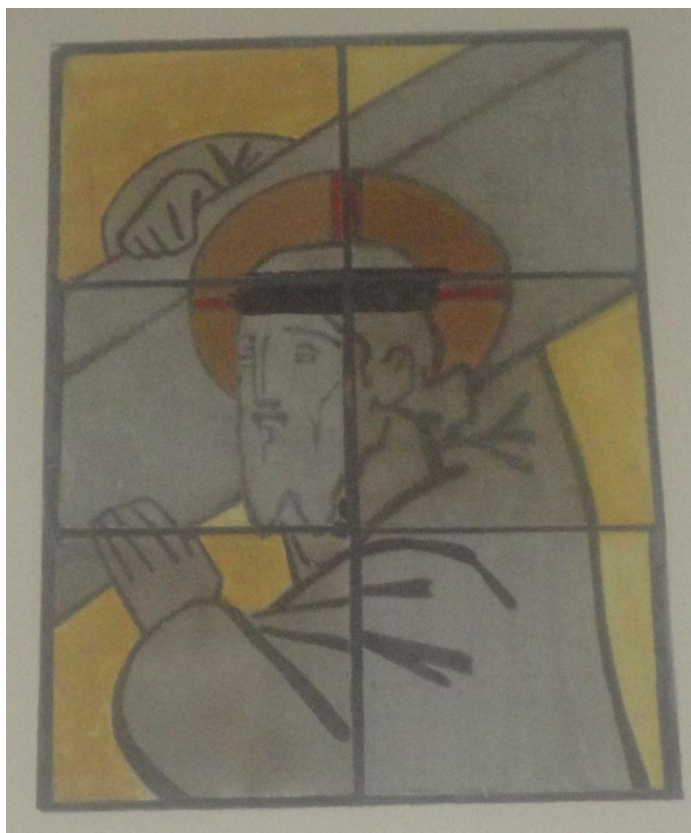


Fig. 48. Jean Charlot, Station 2, Stations of the Cross, 1958

Ceramic tile, 3 x 2 feet

St. Catherine's Church, Kapa'a, Kaua'i, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 49. Jean Charlot, Preparatory drawing for Compassionate Christ, 1958
St. Catherine's Church, Kapa'a, Kaua'i, Hawai'i
Charcoal and crayon drawing, 12 1/4 x 30 1/4 inches
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 50. View of the altar and Jean Charlot, *Way of the Cross*, 1956
St. Sylvester's Church, Kilauea, Kaua'i, Hawai'i
Photograph by author.



Fig. 51. Interior of St. William's Church, Hanalei, Kaua'i, Hawai'i
Photograph by author



Fig. 52. Jean Charlot, Station 13, The Body of Jesus is Removed from the Cross, 1958
Ceramic tile, 18 x 19 inches
St. William's Church, Hanalei, Kaua'i,
Hawai'i
Photograph by author
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permission.



Fig. 53. Jean Charlot, Sacred Heart, 1969
St. William's Church, Hanalei, Kaua'i, Hawai'i
Ceramic statue, 7 1/2 feet high
Photograph by author
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 54. Jean Charlot, Stations of the Cross, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 1958
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 55. Jean Charlot, Station 12, il meurt, 1918
 Print, 17 x 11 inches
 in Peter Morse, *Jean Charlot's Prints: A Catalogue
 Raisonné* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press,
 1976), 17.
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 56. Jean Charlot, *Way of the Cross*, 1918 (reprinted in 1977) installed at St. Philip of Neri, Rock Hill, South Carolina
Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 57. Jean Charlot, Christ as the Vine, with Saints, 1959

Fresco, 11 x 15 feet

The Oratory, Rock Hill Congregation of St. Philip Neri, Rock Hill, South Carolina

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

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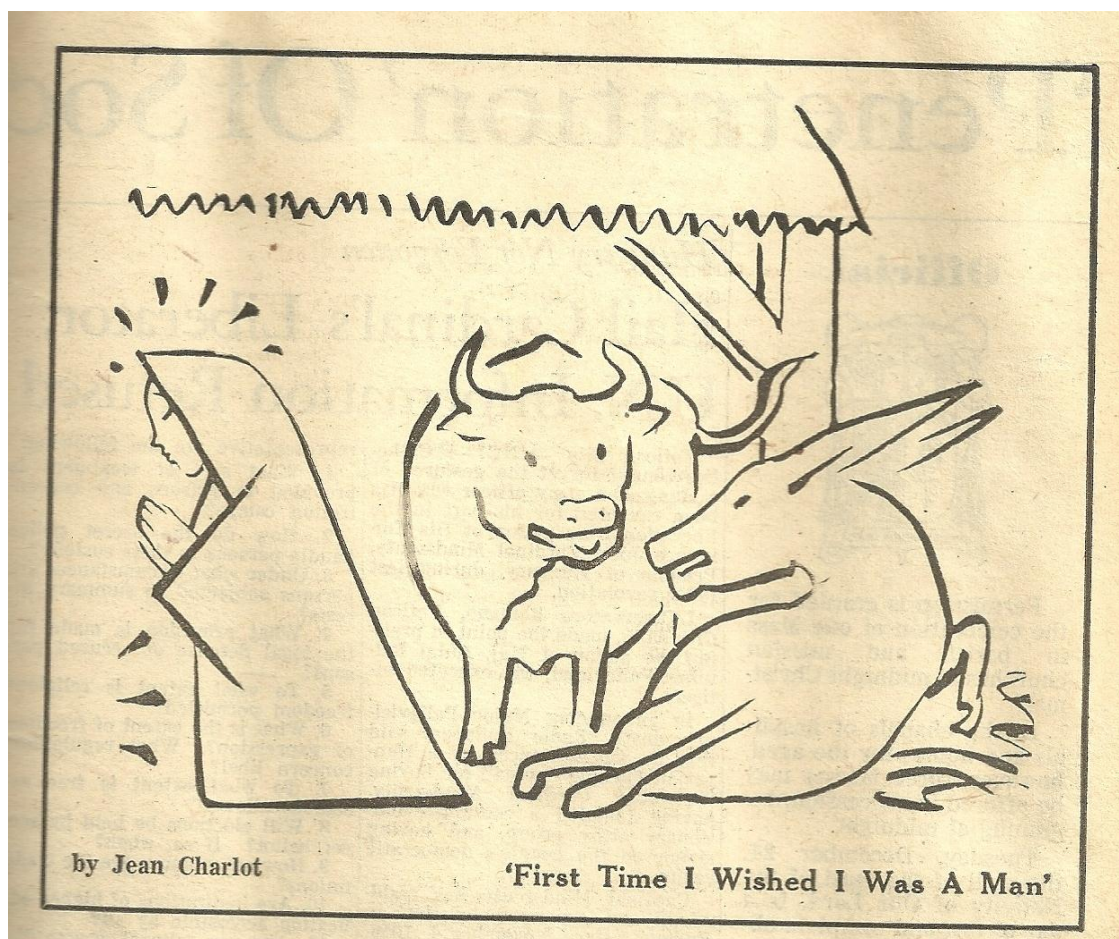


Fig. 58. Jean Charlot, Untitled ("First Time I Wished I was a Man"), Catholic
Missourian, December 22, 1957

Illustration, 4 ½ x 5 ½ inches

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 59. Jean Charlot, Christmas card, ca. 1947

Dimensions unknown

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

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With permission.



Fig. 60. Jean Charlot, Christmas card, 1951

Dimensions unknown

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

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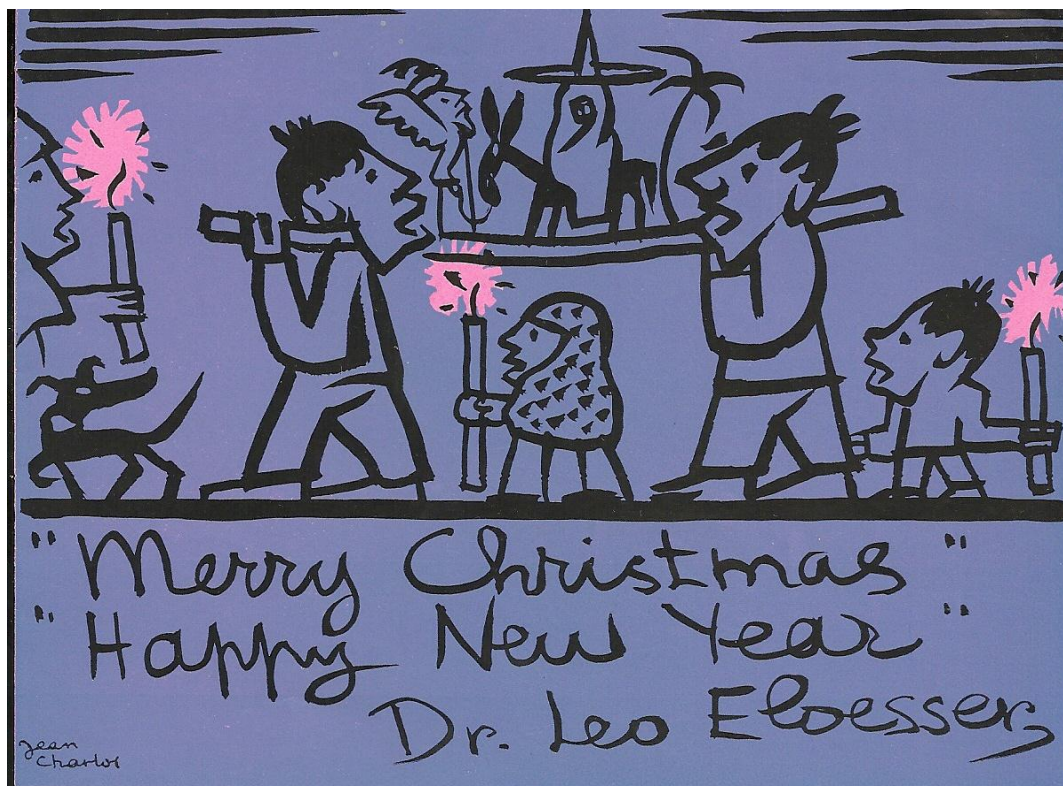


Fig. 61. Jean Charlot, Christmas card to Dr. Leo Eloesser

Dimensions unknown

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

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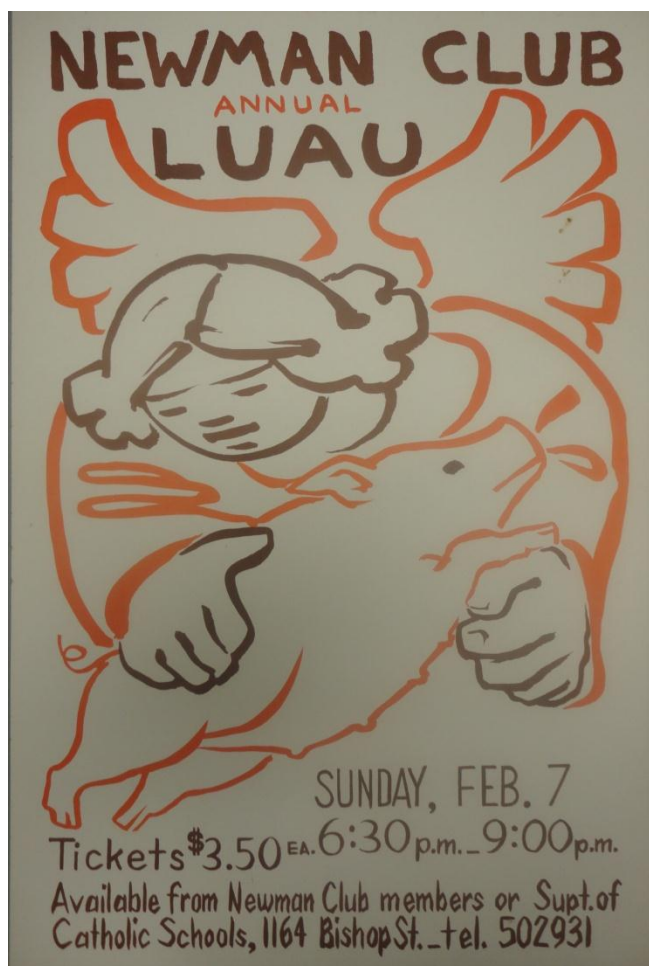


Fig. 62. Jean Charlot posters for annual luau for the Newman Club
 Print, 20 1/4 x 13 1/2 inches
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i
 Photograph by author
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 63. Jean Charlot, murals for St. Francis Xavier Church, Naiserelagi, Province of Ra, Fiji, 1962–3

Fresco, right to left: 10 x 12, 10 x 30, 10 x 12 feet

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

Photograph by Caroline Klarr

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 64. Jean Charlot, Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well, 1978

Fresco, 5 x 6 feet

Maryknoll Elementary School, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

© The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

IV. ALFREDO RAMOS MARTÍNEZ

During the first half of the twentieth century, while many American artists traveled to Mexico and were forever changed by their experience with the culture, the landscape, and the murals, the prominent Mexican painter, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, made the journey in reverse, leaving his native Mexico for the United States in 1929. His mural production in Southern California was a major contribution to the visual arts in the region and ultimately led to a more complex history of American art. Charlot and Ramos Martínez share much in common. Both artists were important individuals in the development of Mexican modernism in the United States and were closely affiliated with the burgeoning movement of Mexican muralism in the 1920s. Most notably, both exhibit atypical narratives in the story of Mexican muralism and the interpretation of the movement in the United States as both pursued religious subject matter. The sense of community found in religious spaces appealed to both Charlot and Ramos Martínez and their most significant murals were produced in buildings with spiritual functions.³¹⁶ This connection to communal experiences was also evident in both artists' repeated depiction of the indigenous population. There were differences too. Ramos Martínez was born twenty-seven years before Charlot, so they were a part of a different generation. After moving to the US, Charlot continued to be more associated with an elite circle of avant-garde artists who were widely known and he is often mentioned in concert with such leading figures as Rivera, Weston, and Modotti. Lastly, more source material exists on

³¹⁶ I contend that Ramos Martínez's mural cycle for the Santa Barbara Cemetery is his most important mural cycle in the United States. While his work for Scripps is impressive, it was left incomplete when the artist passed away. Other important works like his murals for Jo Swerling's private residence and his mural for La Avenida Café were made with commercial appeal in mind and though significant, they also rank behind the Santa Barbara mural cycle.

Charlot than on Ramos Martínez, although there is still a considerable amount to uncover. This chapter addresses Ramos Martínez's biography. His relation to other leading artists, his involvement in the mural movement, and the other types of media such as paintings and drawings in which the artist developed his own original representation of Mexican culture, traditional still-lives, and religious iconography are also considered.

A. Early Biography

Born on November 12, 1871 in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, to Jacobo Ramos and Luisa Martínez, Ramos Martínez showed great artistic promise at an early age. As an adolescent, he submitted a portrait of the Governor of Monterrey to an exhibition in San Antonio, Texas, and he won first prize for the painting.³¹⁷ This honor included a scholarship to the National Academy of Fine Arts in Mexico City.³¹⁸

Despite not having other artists in the family, his parents supported the young Ramos Martínez's interest in painting by helping him settle in Coyoacán so he could attend classes at the National Academy of Fine Arts. Ramos Martínez was formally a student at the institution in 1890 and remained involved with the Academy as either a student or participant in exhibitions until his departure for Europe in 1900.³¹⁹ While it was a terrific honor for Ramos Martínez to attend the National Academy of Fine Arts, he preferred the inspiration of the city growing around him as opposed to spending many hours indoors. His father received a letter from the Director of the National Academy of

³¹⁷ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 17.

³¹⁸ The Academy of San Carlos, founded in 1783, underwent many name changes during its history. In 1876 it began to be called the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes (The National Academy of Fine Arts). During Ramos Martínez's time at the Academy as both student and later director, the institution went by this name. The frequent name changes have often caused confusion on the part of many scholars. In talking about Ramos Martínez's biography, different terms by various scholars are used to describe the same institution, but the National Academy of Fine Arts is the most accurate term.

³¹⁹ Favela, *Una visión retrospectiva*, 20.

Fine Arts, informing him that Ramos Martínez often left class to paint nature and to sketch portraits of the local indigenous laborers.³²⁰ Although this interest in indigenous culture occurred early, it did not come to full fruition until much later. As a young man, Ramos Martínez reveled in the things of everyday life, and he incorporated them frequently in his work. His experiences in Mexico City served as a type of fantasy land for the young artist. Due to his growing up on a *hacienda* in Monterrey, he was sheltered, knew little about the history of art in Mexico, and had no regular interactions with the diverse people of Mexico. These facts were similar to the life of Rivera, who also showed artistic promise at a young age and only later in life developed the affinity for both the contemporary indigenous cultures of Mexico and the pre-Columbian history of the region, two interests frequently associated with his work after he returned to Mexico from Europe. Though there were similarities in the formative years of Ramos Martínez and Rivera, one difference in their upbringing was related to the economic stature of their families. Rivera's father was a teacher, and he grew up in a middle class family, while Ramos Martínez's family was wealthy.

During his formal training, Ramos Martínez participated in several group exhibitions at the National Academy of Fine Arts. By 1890, he was considered to be a graduate of the school, but like many prominent painters of the day, he continued to display work at the institution. In 1899, he participated in the twenty-second annual group show and received a small section of the exhibition space where he presented seventeen watercolors.³²¹

³²⁰ Brooke Waring, "Martínez and Mexico's Renaissance," *The North American Review* 240, no. 3 (December 1935):448.

³²¹ Ramón Favela, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Una visión retrospectiva*, 21.

In 1899, Ramos Martínez's encounter with the American philanthropist Phoebe Hearst (1842–1919) forever changed his career.³²² During a visit to Mexico City, Hearst attended a state dinner hosted by President Porfirio Díaz. Díaz, as addressed earlier, ruled Mexico from 1876 to 1911 and his oppressive administration contributed to the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Díaz favored art from Spain exemplified by his organization of a Spanish art exhibition in 1910 to commemorate the centennial of the beginning of the Mexican Independence movement. Jean Charlot described Díaz's plans, "The President of the Republic, Don Porfirio Díaz, with a kind of surrealistic logic, ruled that a gigantic display of contemporary Spanish art should add a fitting gloss to the celebration. Towards the end, a government subvention of 35,000 pesos was readily earmarked, and a specially constructed exhibition building thrown in."³²³ Despite Díaz's preferred tastes, Ramos Martínez played a special role in the dinner attended by Hearst. The young artist decorated the invitations for the dinner. He painted flowers on the menus, and his skill at floral representations reoccurred in later still-lives and in his mural cycle located in Ensenada, Mexico, which will be addressed later. After seeing his work, Hearst offered to pay for Ramos Martínez to move to Paris and pursue his work.

The sponsored trip to Europe came at a point in Ramos Martínez's career when he was already interested in painting outdoors and time in France allowed him to engage further with Impressionism. Hearst's financial support gave him the freedom to focus on his art, and he engaged with the intellectual and artistic circles in Paris. Ramos Martínez

³²² Hearst, the mother of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, was a philanthropist and a champion of the right for women to vote.

³²³ Jean Charlot, "Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos," *College Art Journal* 10, no.4 (Summer 1951): 356.

wrote Hearst letters thanking her for her support and updating her on his projects.³²⁴ He arrived in Paris in 1900 where he met several well-known artists and writers. He developed a close friendship with the writer Rubén Darío (1867–1916) from Nicaragua and he lived with Darío and the Mexican poet Amado Nervo (1870–1919) in Paris. Darío proved to be a fortuitous friend who introduced Ramos Martínez to a number of artists and writers. One notable introduction came when Ramos Martínez met the Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923), whose dramatic use of light in his depictions of the outdoors influenced Ramos Martínez. Ramos Martínez and Darío traveled in Europe together spending time in Belgium and the Netherlands. Their friendship would continue throughout their lives, and they routinely spoke positively about each other's work. Rubén Darío's poem, "A un pintor," was written in honor of Ramos Martínez and originally published in Darío's book, *El Canto Errante*, 1907.

Another literary figure who Ramos Martínez met was the writer Remy de Gourmont (1858–1915) "who at that time was the idol of the young French intellectuals."³²⁵ Ramos Martínez recounted that he did not have time to sit at the café and idolize de Gourmont like the others; instead he was more focused on his own work.³²⁶ This creative concentration led to Ramos Martínez's modest success in Europe. In Paris, he exhibited watercolors and was invited to become a member of the Société des Aquarellistes Françaises. While Charlot held court with the many avant-garde writers and artists in Mexico City during the 1920s, Ramos Martínez's relationships were less

³²⁴ Ramón Favela, "Apuntes documentales para un estudio de la obra de Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946) durante la época de la Academia (Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1890-99) y de París (1900–1909)," *Una visión retrospectiva*, 24-25

³²⁵ Waring, 450.

³²⁶ Ibid.

glamorous. His friendship with Darío and his acquaintanceship with de Gourmont represent some of the artist's most high profile interactions in Europe.

Not all of Ramos Martínez's time in Europe was spent in Paris. He left the city annually for the French countryside and developed a fondness for the village life he encountered. In particular the community of Plumanac in Brittany was of interest to the impressionable Ramos Martínez. Like Charlot, Ramos Martínez aligned himself with the peasant class and found their daily life and traditions to be a great source for artistic inspiration. The seeds of inspiration in Brittany later led to a more developed commitment to the worker. Ramos Martínez's wife, María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, published a book on the artist that included stories told to her about his time in Europe.³²⁷ Sodi de Ramos Martínez wrote, "How Alfredo delighted to paint the clumsy movements and the religious humility of these people!"³²⁸ Like Charlot and many other painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ramos Martínez was inspired by the Breton peasants. "By 1904, Ramos had created a large body of work based on painting trips to Brittany. The palette, dominated by umbers and sepias, underscores the artist's sensitivity not only to the environment, but also to the harsh poverty endured by a people who live off the land and the sea."³²⁹ A small village scene of Mallorca, Spain, created in 1908, demonstrates the prevalent restrained color palette of this period in the artist's work (fig. 65). Though Ramos Martínez's palette was subdued and for the most part darker than his later work, the hues he used began to lighten toward the end of his time in

³²⁷ The couple was not together during Ramos Martínez's time in Europe. They met after his return to Mexico and married there.

³²⁸ María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, trans. Berta de Lecuona (Los Angeles, CA: Martínez Foundation, 1949), 21.

³²⁹ *Alfredo Ramos Martínez y Modernismo*, 27.

Europe and became brighter after he moved to Mexico and later to California; however, his future works often retained a sense of this early color choice.³³⁰

During the fourteen years he remained in Europe, Ramos Martínez spent time in Spain (specifically Mallorca), Italy, and the Netherlands. His old friend Darío later recounted,

I will never forget the hours when he painted golden afternoons in Holland and gray melancholy days in Paris. One must understand the intimate union that exists between a painter and a poet. There is much poetry and much of poetry in painting. One is but to be reminded that in the Renaissance nearly all painters were poets—those who did not write verses painted poems. Ramos Martínez is one of those who paints poems; he does not copy, he interprets; he understands how to express the sorrow of the fishermen and the melancholy of the villages.³³¹

Just as Ramos Martínez paintings were unforgettable to the poet, Darío's elegant prose continued to inspire Ramos Martínez.³³² Like Charlot, Ramos Martínez developed a deep connection with significant writers. While Darío and Ramos Martínez were close, Charlot, as we have seen in the last chapters, also developed long lasting relationships with writers such as Paul Claudel and the poets he met as a part of the Estridentista movement in Mexico City.

Although many different things inspired Ramos Martínez in Europe such as the landscape, the people, and the traditions they practiced in small villages, he also began to render portraits of mothers and their children while abroad. Representations of an ordinary mother and child were a type of surrogate portrait of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus. Both Charlot and Ramos Martínez frequently depicted mothers with their children

³³⁰ The mural cycle in Santa Barbara presents sepia hues and the newspaper pages aged over time possess similar hues. It is hard to imagine that the artist did not anticipate that the ageing of the paper would affect the color composition of the newspaper works.

³³¹ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 23.

³³² *Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Modernismo*, 23.

and continued to render these portraits both in Mexico and later in the United States. This connection cannot be seen as only a manifestation of their interest in the experience of motherhood. Given both artists' deep connection to Catholicism and their pursuit of religious iconography in their work, the constant repetition of women in both artists' work cannot be ignored as mere coincidence; this point will be further examined later in this chapter.

For six years during his stay in Europe, Ramos Martínez benefited from the support of Hearst. However, around the same time that his painting *Le Printemps*, 1905 was awarded first prize at the Salon, Hearst ceased supporting the artist (fig. 66).³³³ Ramos Martínez's *Printemps* references many of the women portrayed by the Spanish painter Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta (1870–1945). Zuloaga was active in both Paris and Madrid at the turn of the twentieth-century and frequently depicted attractive women, with great attention to their dress, posed in lush landscape settings.³³⁴ Ramos Martínez exhibited works at a number of annual Salon d'Automne exhibitions, but the recognition he received for *Le Printemps* marked a turning point in his career. The removal of the monetary support made life more stressful; however, Ramos Martínez embraced the opportunity to try to be on his own financially. He copied famous works of art to sell and obtained a number of commissions for portraits, most notably from Marquise de la Tour d'Obnerne, a noted member of the French aristocracy, who became a loyal patron.³³⁵

Le Printemps arrived in Mexico before Ramos Martínez returned to his birth country, as was customary. Successful Mexican painters in Europe often sent back

³³³ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 22.

³³⁴ Another connection between the two artists was religion. Zuloaga painted religious scenes and included Catholic references in some of his compositions.

³³⁵ Ibid, 23.

important paintings to Mexico, where their works could be appreciated by both art students and patrons.³³⁶ The painting portrays elegant women passing time along the water's edge. The clothes of the women and the landscape itself are accentuated with pastel hues. Overall the painting evokes an "ethereal" quality and a "frivolous character."³³⁷ The great Mexican painter and consummate critic Orozco described the painting after viewing it in Mexico, "four or five aristocratic girls are shown in garments of vaporous texture and delicate colors, amidst an inundation of flowers, ribbons, and laces, and the whole picture is bathed in a perfume-laden atmosphere."³³⁸ Though the painting may have ignited interest on both sides of the Atlantic, it was not the type of composition that Orozco typically favored.

Like Charlot, Ramos Martínez's formative years as an artist were spent mostly in Paris, but additional travel in Western Europe proved influential. Even earlier artists like Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), with their dedication to rendering the beauty of the outdoors, were inspirational to Ramos Martínez.³³⁹ Furthermore, the "qualities of going into the countryside, painting what was seen on the spot and living a strong and simple, yet virtuous life, were all components of Ramos Martínez who applied its general principle in his Open Air School."³⁴⁰ Similar to Ramos

³³⁶ Most notably, Juan Cordero sent from Italy his *Columbus Before the Catholic Monarchs*, 1850 before returning to his birth country of Mexico.

³³⁷ Karen Cordero, "Alfredo Ramos Martínez: 'Un pintor de mujeres y de flores' ante el ámbito estético postrevolucionario (1920–1929)," *Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Una visión retrospectiva*, 64.

³³⁸ José Clemente Orozco, *José Clemente Orozco: An Autobiography*, 37.

³³⁹ George Raphael Small, *Ramos Martínez: His Life and Art* (Westlake Village, California: F & J Publishing Corporation, 1975), 79.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Martínez, many well-known Mexican painters lived in Paris for a considerable time before returning to Mexico.³⁴¹

In 1909, Ramos Martínez came back to Mexico, just as the Mexican Revolution was about to commence. The relationship between the Revolution and the Mexican muralists is often a point of emphasis in the analysis of their artistic production; while Ramos Martínez lived in Mexico during the Revolution, his work took a less blatantly political focus than that of *los tres grandes*.³⁴² In fact, at times he seemed to focus more on the portraits of wealthy *criolla* women (born in Mexico, but of Spanish heritage) and aimed for representations of women that evoked thoughts of women painted by the great Spanish masters Francisco de la Goya (1746–1828) and Joaquín Sorolla.³⁴³ Similarly, Charlot chose an apolitical stance toward the Revolution in his art, but unlike Ramos Martínez, Charlot arrived in Mexico after the armed conflict had ceased. Back in Mexico, Ramos Martínez re-settled in Coyoacán and he thrived in the arts community-centered around the neighborhood. The colonial architecture of Coyoacán appealed to the artist.

With deep roots in the sixteenth century, Coyoacán was at one time the home of Hernán Cortés and a colonial Franciscan *convento*, the area evoked memories of the historic past, while also serving as a home to many of the artists of Mexico's future. After viewing some of his earlier pre-Europe sketches upon returning to Mexico, Ramos Martínez declared, "My God! Why did I go to Paris? Could I only see so unsophisticated

³⁴¹ Most markedly, Rivera lived in France, Spain, and traveled to other parts of Europe. For over a decade Rivera embraced European movements such as Post-Impressionism and Cubism. During his time in Europe, Rivera made over two hundred Cubist works. Other significant Mexican modernists who benefited from time in Europe and later returned home to Mexico included Adolfo Best Maugard (1891–1964), Angel Zárraga (1886–1946), and Francisco Goitia (1882–1960).

³⁴² Fausto Ramírez, "Alfredo Ramos Martínez," *Modernización y modernismo en el arte mexicano* (Mexico: UNAM, 2008), 391-7.

³⁴³ Margarita Nieto, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Una visión retrospectiva*, 90.

again. Art must be pure. Yes, I have learned technique, anatomy; I have absorbed a little Giotto, a little El Greco, a little Cézanne, but I have submerged my own individualism. My subconscious is a walking Louvre. I have died of too many advantages. My sympathy is here, where I belong, among my own people.”³⁴⁴ Here, Ramos Martínez practically renounced his European art education in favor of embracing his Mexican culture. After crossing international borders and returning to his native country, he was struck by the realization of his deep emotional connection to Mexican culture. He returned to Mexico with a grand vision, but his excitement for Mexican culture and art did not immediately translate into diverse subject matter in his own art.

Ultimately, Ramos Martínez found himself in a liminal space upon returning to Mexico. He was heralded for his successes abroad, he delighted in the new inspiration he found at home, but he also clung to some of the traditional imagery he had been drawn to in Europe. In 1910, he painted a portrait of a beautiful young woman with red curls, porcelain skin, and a fashionable hat (fig. 67). Ironically this pristine, bourgeois portrait of a pretty lady was completed during the same year the Revolution began. The contrast between the subject and the year in which it was created mimics the conflict that Ramos Martínez found upon returning to Mexico. While he espoused groundbreaking ideas, his own art was often on the periphery of leading artistic trends.

In addition to his stated enthusiasm for Mexico, the art students at the National Academy of Fine Arts admired Ramos Martínez for his time in Europe, and he was quickly asked to become Assistant Director in 1911. The Academy had been besieged with protestors and there was great hope that Ramos Martínez could bring stability to the

³⁴⁴ Waring, 453.

storied arts institution. Just two years later, he was promoted to Director of the Academy. Charlot, in one of the many scholarly works he would produce on modern Mexican art, later described this important moment in the development of modern Mexican art history, “In an election freely held by both teachers and students, Ramos Martínez—who was the candidate of the anti-academic element within the Academy—won the Directorship of the school. At that time and in that milieu his style for painting, courting, as it did, Whistler and Impressionism, carried the impact of a revolutionary manifesto.”³⁴⁵ While in hindsight Whistler and Impressionism might seem conservative in comparison to the later movement of Mexican muralism, for some this type of work was radical in the moment that came immediately before the most internationally-renowned movement in Mexican art history, Mexican muralism.

Ramos Martínez was an active participant in laying the groundwork for the renaissance in Mexican modern art that would begin in the 1920s, though he frequently faced challenges. His appointment as Director in 1913 only lasted one year, and he was replaced by Gerardo Murillo (1875–1964) also known as Dr. Atl, a landscape painter. Murillo’s own art was revolutionary in content, but he was more aligned with Rivera and the other powerful radical artists. Shortly after assuming the Directorship in late 1914, Murillo closed the Open Air School in Santa Anita Ixtapalapa because he did not believe that the goals of the School were in line with the avant-garde direction of Mexican art and he asserted that the Ramos Martínez-led initiative had become associated with romantic ideas about Mexican identity.³⁴⁶ Broadly speaking, Ramos Martínez was associated with

³⁴⁵ Jean Charlot, “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” 362.

³⁴⁶ Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y Poder*, 37.

academicism, apolitical sentiment, and Impressionism.³⁴⁷ Ramos Martínez's position at the National Academy of Fine Arts contributed to his clout in Mexico City and the resources at his disposal allowed him to lead a major revolution in arts education with the founding of the Open Air Schools.

B. Ramos Martínez and the Open Air Schools

Ramos Martínez is the artist most associated with the influential Open Air Schools in Mexico. The Open Air movement preceded the Mexican mural movement as the most innovative twentieth-century art development in Mexico. In her work on the Open Air Schools, Ana Mae Barbosa identifies Ramos Martínez's initiative as "the first movement of popular education through art in Latin America and also the first movement that integrated education through art and design in Latin America."³⁴⁸ In 1913, he became the Director (and founder) of the first Open Air School in Mexico at Santa Anita Ixtapalapa with ten adolescent students.³⁴⁹ At that time, he was still Director of the Academy and the Open Air Schools were initially operated under the auspices of the historic institution of the National Academy of Fine Arts. Generally speaking, "The Open Air Schools project was a crucial step in Ramos's plan to change the curriculum at the National Academy. As director, he was finally in a position to redefine academic understanding of how to train artists. Ramos Martínez's philosophy was rooted in his instinctual belief in the sureness of an artist's vision and confirmed by his experiences in

³⁴⁷ Azuela de la Cueva, 58.

³⁴⁸ Ana Mae Barbosa, "The Escuelas de Pintura al Aire Libre in Mexico: Freedom, Form, and Culture," *Studies in Art Education* 42, no.4 (Summer 2001): 287.

³⁴⁹ *Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Modernismo*. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 35.

Europe with the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.”³⁵⁰ Ramos Martínez wanted his students to paint from live models as opposed to plaster casts, and he encouraged them to interact with nature and to embrace the beauty of Mexico.³⁵¹

The Open Air movement became extremely powerful and several schools were founded during the opening decades of the twentieth century. In effect, the establishment of the Open Air Schools marked a radical change, ignited an upheaval in arts education in Mexico City, and attracted the attention of the establishment.

Except for a very few artist-teachers, working more or less in isolation, there was almost no widespread teaching of the young which was of interpretative value. As has been noted several times, the results achieved by Martínez in his organization of classes for youthful students in his capacity as Director of the Academy of Bellas Artes [National Academy of Fine Arts] marked a turning point in the contemporary art of Mexico.³⁵²

Ramos Martínez continued to pursue his interest in bringing students to the countryside and rented a home in Santa Anita Ixtapalapa. There was a patio in the house where students set up easels and the home was nicknamed “Barbizon.”³⁵³ The school welcomed many children as students and gave them with art supplies including paint, canvases, and the necessary materials for sculpture.³⁵⁴

When Ramos Martínez again became the Director of the National Academy of Fine Arts in 1920, he was quick to re-instate the Open Air School program. He unveiled his latest realization of the Open Air project in Chimalistac. José Vasconcelos, the same Minister of Education who supported Rivera and his public art projects in during the

³⁵⁰ Ibid. Eventually fourteen individual Open Air Schools were founded.

³⁵¹ Jean Charlot, “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” 362–3.

³⁵² Donald Bear, “The Paintings and Frescos of Alfredo Ramos Martínez,” in María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, trans. Berta de Lecuona. (Los Angeles, CA: Martínez Foundation, 1949), 50.

³⁵³ Jean Charlot, “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” 364.

³⁵⁴ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 28.

1920s, supported Ramos Martínez at both the Academy and at the Open Air School.

Vasconcelos and Ramos Martínez argued that the Open Air Schools were places where aspiring artists could focus on the Mexican landscape and that attention to both Mexican topography and traditions could result in a new art form for Mexico. In addition to their faith in the Open Air Schools initiative, both men were also loyal Catholics and Vasconcelos opposed the government sanctions against the Catholic Church in Mexico during the late 1920s.³⁵⁵

Volunteer teachers at the Open Air schools included Charlot, Rufino Tamayo, and Fernando Leal. Some of the students of the Open Air schools who ultimately established themselves as viable artists in their own right include Rosario Cabrera (1901–1975) and Mardonio Magaña (1868–1947). Cabrera was a student of the Open Air School in Chimalistac and later received a grant in 1924 from the Mexican government to pursue her artistic studies in Paris.³⁵⁶ Eventually she became the Director of the Open Air schools in Coyoacán in 1928 and in Cholula, Puebla in 1929. Magaña's distinctive wood sculptures of daily life experience made him one of the most noteworthy sculptors working in Mexico during a time when so much emphasis was placed on painting, and in particular, mural painting. Magaña's portrayal of everyday life and Cabrera's ability to depict the mundane reflect Ramos Martínez's objectives to embrace the local in the process of revolutionizing Mexican art. Furthermore, all three artists, Cabrera, Magaña, and Ramos Martínez demonstrated sensitivity to the working class by their ardent commitment to the plight of the people.

³⁵⁵ Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 232.

³⁵⁶ Laura González Matute, "Rosario Cabrera, Red House," *Mexican Modern Painting from the Andrés Blaisten Collection* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 2011), 58.

Another artist who played an important role at the school was Adolfo Best Maugard, one of the many Mexican painters who spent time in Europe. He developed a method of drawing and this technique was used at the Open Air Schools. While he was not a student at the Open Air Schools, Maugard's designs were based on indigenous art forms he had studied. He reduced his inspiration to a system of patterns that students at the Open Air School were encouraged to experiment within their work. Like Ramos Martínez, Maugard was an important figure, but he remains on the periphery of the central narrative of Mexican modernism.

Perhaps the most notorious student who studied with Ramos Martínez was David Alfaro Siqueiros. Siqueiros's father wrote Ramos Martínez a letter on December 17, 1913 asking why his son came home so late from his classes at the Academy or at the house in Santa Anita Ixtapalapa.³⁵⁷ Ramos Martínez responded that the classes ended before nightfall and that some stayed overnight—but those were students who received special grants and he reminded Siqueiros's father that his son was not one of them. According to Siqueiros, the house was also a site for political activism, where “under the cloak of protection spread by the gentle unworldliness of Martínez, there were underground political meetings at Barbizon, where plots were hatched against the dictatorial Huerta regime.”³⁵⁸ At a time when political rebellion was a part of the very core of Mexico's cultural fabric, no art school, no matter how historic, was safe from radical activism. Artist Philip Stein wrote of the first Open Air School in his thorough biography of Siqueiros that, “It was no Barbizon; Santa Anita had its share of the impoverishment that invaded all parts of the country. Nor could the students, under the tutelage of Alfredo

³⁵⁷ Jean Charlot, “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” 364.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Ramos Martínez, recently returned from France, repeat the idyllic experiences of Impressionism's innovators. Their studies were increasingly interrupted by the excitement and political unrest in the country.”³⁵⁹ Stein was correct when he described the Open Air Schools as spaces for political development, but to be clear, the political agenda of Siqueiros and his fellow students and the aims of Open Air education were not in polar opposite positions. Both the Open Air Schools and the political rebellion apparent in the communities where the schools were located contributed to the Mexican mural movement by expanding the possibilities of what artists were capable of accomplishing in twentieth-century Mexico. Mexican muralism was not an anomaly without roots; instead it was deeply embedded within the history of Mexican art.

The success of the schools led to a return trip to Europe for Ramos Martínez when the President of Mexico at the time, Plutarco Elías Calles (1877–1945), wanted to send a variety of Mexican art to Europe to demonstrate the diverse talents of the country. Among the works selected for display were some two-hundred works by students from the Open Air Schools.³⁶⁰ In her biography of her husband, María Sodi de Ramos Martínez recounted that the exhibition inspired reviews from a number of French newspapers and artists Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Raoul Dufy (1877–1953) visited the exhibition.³⁶¹ After exhibiting in Paris, Ramos Martínez traveled with the exhibition to Berlin and Madrid and eventually returned to Mexico after eleven months in Europe. This subsequent trip to Europe was much shorter than his previous European sojourn; however, this time in Europe marked a professional change in Ramos Martínez's life, a

³⁵⁹ Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 21.

³⁶⁰ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 29.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 30.

path that he would continue in the United States. By traveling with the works by the students from the Open Air School, Ramos Martínez became an international ambassador of Mexican art and demonstrated on an international stage his innovative approach to spreading Mexican art education. Although the shows celebrated the artistic revolution in Mexico, they were also put together with an ethnographic approach and the selection of works favored European trends. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition, published after the works returned from Europe, presented each artist's picture and listed the age of the artist, the name of his parents, and the occupation of his father. Students whose works demonstrated Post-Impressionist and Cubist trends as opposed to a "naïve" approach were featured in the book.³⁶² The tour extended to the United States, and in 1926, Ramos Martínez traveled to Los Angeles with an exhibition of work by artists from the Open Air Schools.³⁶³ This would be his first trip to the city he would soon call his home.

Despite his successes, Ramos Martínez consistently experienced obstacles in regard to the situation at the Academy and with the Open Air Schools. There was a group of artists and students who supported Rivera and a similar sized group behind Ramos Martínez and the Open Air School; however, these groups were often at odds. At the same time the artists who created murals at the National Preparatory School were getting to work in the early 1920s, Ramos Martínez and his re-started Open Air Schools were against propagandistic art and preferred art devoid of political motives.³⁶⁴ Instead, Ramos Martínez was committed to the identification of a Mexican art sensibility and daily

³⁶² Barbosa, 290-2.

³⁶³ Dr. Margarita Nieto (Professor of Chicano/a Studies and Art History, Cal State Northridge), in discussion with the author, January 2012.

³⁶⁴ Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y poder: renacimiento artístico y revolución social, México, 1910–1945* (Zamora, Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005), 57.

contact with nature. Despite his commitment to a new identity for Mexico, Ramos Martínez lost the power struggle with Rivera and his contemporaries in the fight to steer modernism in Mexico. In fact, Rivera was openly critical of Ramos Martínez's Open Air project and its ties to Europe.³⁶⁵ "The man who became largely responsible for revolutionizing art instruction in Mexico was subject to official neglect in 1926 by the administration of the Department of Education."³⁶⁶ Art historian Karen Cordero argues that under his leadership the schools had become the space for fortunate ladies to learn art.³⁶⁷ Moreover, she contends that under new leadership during the mid to late 1920s, the schools took a more populist approach. Ramos Martínez was left behind as the momentum of artistic opportunity in Mexico became recalibrated toward *los tres grandes* and the rest of the Mexican muralists.

While Ramos Martínez was concerned with his education and administrative positions and preoccupied by his own art, his primary devotion was to his family. Ramos Martínez married María Sodi Romero in 1928 and their daughter was born in 1929. Their daughter, also named María, was born with a debilitating bone disease and the family was advised to seek medical treatment in the United States. After briefly spending time in other parts of the US such as the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, on October 17, 1929, Ramos Martínez and his family relocated to Los Angeles, California.³⁶⁸ This move occurred one week before the Stock Market Crash on October 24, 1929. Initially, Ramos Martínez

³⁶⁵ Ramírez, *Modernización y modernismo en el arte mexicano*, 26-7.

³⁶⁶ Ana Mae Barbosa, "The Open Air School in Mexico: Freedom, Form, and Culture," *Studies in Art Education*, 42, no.4 (Summer, 2001): 285-297.

³⁶⁷ Cordero, 71.

³⁶⁸ Ramos Martínez's daughter continues to live in Los Angeles. Throughout her life, she has faced many undisclosed health issues.

viewed the move to California as a temporary act.³⁶⁹ He envisioned that once his daughter's health improved, he and his family would return to Mexico. He did not plan for the fact that the move to the United States would transform his identity as an artist.³⁷⁰ Although a new city may have seemed daunting at the time, the artist quickly found himself the recipient of many commissions. Brooke Waring wrote in 1935, "Martínez's success in California is astonishing. While other artists of international reputation are starving, this energetic Mexican is overwhelmed with commissions."³⁷¹ Financial opportunity and a new geographic space moved Ramos Martínez's work in new directions.

C. Murals for Ensenada, Mexico

Ramos Martínez made ten fresco murals during his career, two in Mexico and eight in the United States. Only five of the ten murals are extant. Ramos Martínez completed a mural cycle in Ensenada, Mexico in 1930. The mural in Ensenada was the artist's first opportunity to create a large-scale project after relocating to Los Angeles. Despite the fact that the project took place in his birth country, it was a mural cycle funded by Americans at a space that welcomed wealthy American visitors, a new hotel and casino, known as the Hotel Riviera del Pacífico, less than two hours from the US/Mexico Border.³⁷² The mural cycle for the Hotel Riviera signaled a major turning point in the artist's career. The murals painted in Ensenada led to subsequent commissions in the United States and marked the last time he would paint large-scale

³⁶⁹ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 33.

³⁷⁰ Small, 100.

³⁷¹ Waring, 445.

³⁷² The hotel and casino was first promoted as the Club Internationale of Ensenada and later the Ensenada Beach Club.

works that were purely decorative and without social implications. The confluence of cultural exchange involved in the creation of the casino is indicative of its geographic context, the border region. Southern California and Baja California are a part of one another's cultural fabric and intrinsically intertwined politically, socially, and economically.

During the 1920s, an influx of Americans spent time in Tijuana and Ensenada. As a result of Prohibition, which had passed in 1920 in the United States, Americans were eager to cross the border and to take advantage of Mexico's more liberal liquor policies.³⁷³ Moreover, gambling was a major source of revenue in the small but burgeoning city of Tijuana. As a result of the successful Agua Caliente Hotel, which had opened in June of 1928, both American and Mexican businessmen increasingly recognized the potential of the coast of California as ripe for development as a tourist destination.³⁷⁴ The Tivoli, the San Francisco, and the Foreign Club were all casinos in Tijuana, but the best known was the Agua Caliente. The designers of the Agua Caliente paid attention to details that resulted in a luxurious space that attracted many guests. Grand chandeliers decorated the ceilings, an elaborate tile arch stood in the area near the spa, beautiful bronze door handles adorned the guest rooms, and the Salón de Oro (Golden Room) with walls accentuated with brocade, welcomed visitors.

The counterpart to the Agua Caliente Hotel in Tijuana was the Hotel Riviera in Ensenada. The small city of Ensenada, founded in 1882 and located on the coast of Baja

³⁷³ During Prohibition Americans were not allowed to sell, distribute, or make alcohol.

³⁷⁴ María Eugenia Bonifaz de Novelo, "The Hotel Riviera del Pacífico: Social, Civic and Cultural Center of Ensenada," *The Journal of San Diego History, San Diego Historical Society Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1983):76-85; José Gabriel Rivera Delgado, "El Edificio del ex Hotel Playa, hoy Centro Social, Cívico y Cultural Riviera: Símbolo de la Historia de Ensenada" in *Del Hotel Playa Ensenada al Centro Cultural Riviera, 75 años de historia gráfica* (Mexicali: Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California in association with the Museo de Historia de Ensenada, 2005), 9-17.

California, is located about seventy miles from San Diego and less than a five hour drive from Los Angeles. Its proximity to Southern California allowed for yacht cruises and long drives along the coast for the wealthy and fabulous to venture to the hotel and casino. Hollywood actresses like Myrna Loy (1905–1993), Rita Hayworth (1918 –1987), Dolores del Río (1904–1983), actor Johny Weismuller (1904–1984), and actor and singer Bing Crosby (1903 –1977) flocked to Ensenada in the 1930s for weekend getaways. Other significant names listed on the register include: Marion Davies (1897–1961), William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951), Lupe Vélez (1908–1944), and Frank Morgan (1890–1949). Vélez and del Río were Mexican actresses who found success in the Hollywood film industry, and both were often called upon to play characters that ultimately promoted stereotypes about Mexican identity.³⁷⁵ After appearing in a number of Hollywood films, del Río returned to Mexico, became a pivotal figure in the Golden Renaissance of film in Mexico during the 1940s, and frequently collaborated with the great Mexican film director Emilio Fernández. Perhaps their most famous project was the film *María Candelaria* (1943).³⁷⁶ A decade before Dolores del Río became a pivotal figure in the most storied era in the history of Mexican film, Ramos Martínez created a portrait that resembles her in Ensenada in 1930 (fig. 68). The piece was made by using a *New York Times* newspaper from May 25, 1930 as a surface and was inscribed "To Mrs. Healy/ Sincerely/ Alfredo Ramos Martínez/ Ensenada, 1930."

³⁷⁵ Joanne Hershfield, *Inventing Dolores del Río* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3-4.

³⁷⁶ Dolores del Río appeared in six films directed by Emilio Fernández. She left Hollywood to appear in their first film together, *Flor Silvestre* (1943). The films they made together often grappled with the effects of the Mexican Revolution and the process of re-examining the identity of Mexico. These motivations were mirrored in the intentions of many of the Mexican muralists.

Dolores del Río's work on both sides of the border relates to the experiences of Ramos Martínez and Charlot as all three had to negotiate their identities as artists and find success in portraying certain archetypes of Mexican identity. In particular, del Río and Ramos Martínez share in common their ability to navigate the film industry and the visual art scene respectively in Los Angeles. Ramos Martínez was not the only Mexican muralist to portray del Río. In 1938, Diego Rivera rendered a portrait of the actress.³⁷⁷ Just as Mexican art experienced a renaissance during from the 1920s through the 1940s, the films produced in Mexico during 1940s contribute to the Golden Age of film in Mexico. Different media created in both Mexico City and Los Angeles that presented Mexican identity in some form shared much in common, as they participated in the construction of an image of Mexico that shaped future generations. For Ramos Martínez, the collision of film and his own work proved fruitful as will be discussed further in this chapter; the type of works he created were well received by Hollywood industry professionals. The commission in Ensenada was the first of many that stirred interest in the artist's work among the Hollywood set.

The drive to Ensenada features breathtakingly beautiful views through the mountains and overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the casino itself offered a glamorous environment to sip cocktails, gamble, and escape reality of the "dry" United States. Construction on the casino began in 1928 and it was completed by 1930. The furniture that was especially made for the casino in Ensenada was dark wood with carved

³⁷⁷ The work is currently on view at the Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo in the neighborhood of San Ángel in Mexico City.

features.³⁷⁸ Gordon Mayer was hired as the architect and he designed a building that recalls the Spanish Colonial architectural revival that was popular on both sides of the border in the San Diego/Tijuana region. The materials for the casino were brought in from the United States. Beyond the well-known party-goers and guests at the hotel and casino, Jack Dempsey (1895–1983) was at one point the casino manager and Al Capone (1899–1947) was rumored to be the funder behind the establishment.³⁷⁹

With Ramos Martínez, a Mexican-born artist, returning to Mexico for a project funded by American backers to create a mural that would serve as a catalyst for his later work in the United States and allowed him introduce himself to many American collectors, this Ensenada project serves as an example of the hybridity present in the US/Mexico exchange in terms of the translation of Mexican muralism. The realization of Ramos Martínez murals on both sides of the border is not the product of one nationalistic art form; they exist within the liminal space of the development of American and Mexican art in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁸⁰ Moreover, related to hybridity, this mural project exemplifies the fact that the interchange of mural ideas cannot be easily defined and that the negotiation of ideas is elastic and breaks down concrete lines and borders. From colonial to the present, artists, art, and artistic influence transcends the physical border between the United States and Mexico. This is particularly salient at the

³⁷⁸ Chairs and an embossed, gilded leather folding screen from the casino are on permanent view at the Cultural Center in Tijuana (CECUT), along with a variety of items from the Agua Caliente Hotel in Tijuana.

³⁷⁹ Dempsey was made a Vice President of the organization that backed the casino. Dempsey, as a boxing champion, and his wife actress Estelle Taylor, garnered attention wherever they went, and it was anticipated that their involvement in the casino would stir publicity and increase support.

³⁸⁰ These ideas are discussed further in my forthcoming essay, “Breaking Border: The Power of Mexican Muralism” in the anthology *La obra negra: Una Aproximación a la construcción de la cultura visual de Tijuana*, ed. Carlos Ashida and Olga Margarita Dávila and published by the Centro Cultural Tijuana in 2012, in which I examine the works of Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Everett Gee Jackson, and Jean Charlot in relation to their bi-national existence.

San Diego/Tijuana border crossed by Ramos Martínez to create this mural. From mission architecture to contemporary music trends, the artistic bond between these two cities, regions, and countries is inseparable.

There are three major areas with murals by Ramos Martínez at the casino. The first area includes delicately painted floral patterned murals (fig. 69), the second area includes a mural that portrays a fanciful scene behind the bar of Bar Andaluz (fig. 70), and the third area has six small murals that present a series of nudes in rather classical poses (fig. 71). These murals differ greatly from the mural commissions that follow in San Diego, Santa Barbara, and the Los Angeles area.

The flower patterned murals are often the first works viewed from the current orientation of the building because they are located to the right of the main entrance. These flowers recall many of Ramos Martínez's still-lives created throughout his career. Certainly, flowers have figured prominently in the Ramos Martínez's paintings, his stunning portrait of a young girl in the collection of the National Museum of Art in Mexico City is most striking not because of the girl that it portrays, but because of the brightly colored and delicately painted hydrangea. More typically, he has produced small intimate still-lives on newspapers.³⁸¹ The flower murals at the hotel are on walls, cover doorways, accentuate moldings, and surround a light fixture. The dark black background allows the flowers to pop and add drama to their decorative nature.

³⁸¹ The works on newspapers will be addressed throughout this chapter. While in Europe, Ramos Martínez experimented with newspaper as a material for his compositions as it was readily available and inexpensive; however, it is not until later in California that he frequently used newspapers as a surface for his works. By drawing and painting on newspapers, often on a page from the classifieds or on the front page of a section, Ramos Martínez developed a dynamic juxtaposition between current events in the U.S. and his frequently chosen subject matter of Mexican people.

Just down the corridor from the flower-patterned mural, the Bar Andaluz is a small room with dark wood doors, ceiling, and furniture, giving the space a heavy feeling. In direct contrast to the nature of the design and the furniture in the space, the mural by Ramos Martínez adds a sense of light, merriment, and fantasy to the room, a perfect mix for a bar mural inside a casino. The central figure is a Spanish flamenco dancer, with her head tilted back in ecstasy, she flirts with the viewer. A man offers a drink in a martini glass to this beautiful dancer. Nearby, a large chubby figure enjoys the splendors of life. The frivolity of the scene lends itself to the setting, but differs from Ramos Martínez's later murals in the US where he portrays indigenous laborers from Mexico. A color palette of pastel hues dominates the composition; purple hues in the mountains behind the guitar player are particularly prominent. In front of the mountains, a tall wall with a bell recalls the architectural traditions of the Spanish Missions.

In addition to the translation of the Mexican mural movement into religious spaces, Ramos Martínez and Charlot had in common the ability to pursue their own distinctive artistic style separate from the Mexican muralists and from one another. For his part, Ramos Martínez used a color palette that often differed from the Mexican muralists; for instance, he favored pastel hues. This color palette was not uncommon in fresco painting as the paint pigments lightened slightly over time, and it was a color choice favored by Charlot in his later work.³⁸² The use of pastels, however, was distinctly different from that of Mexican muralists like Siqueiros and Orozco. While Siqueiros's murals were noted for their bold and bright color, Orozco favored gray and red hues. Furthermore, Ramos Martínez's presentation of figures was much more angular than the

³⁸² Charlot studied the fresco technique extensively and taught it to many people, so he would have known that the colors would change over time and applied his chosen pigments accordingly.

rounded figural forms favored by Rivera. Like Ramos Martínez, Charlot also developed a more angular representation of the human form than the noted Mexican muralists. As Ramos Martínez continued to make work in the United States, his style became increasingly angular, more minimalistic, and while he never abandons pastel hues altogether, he started to drift toward more vibrant colors. These shifts in Charlot and Ramos Martínez's work demonstrated their evolution as artists. Both artists continued to refine their style in the US and did not simply stay with the same type of work that they produced in Mexico. Although they both remained dedicated to the presentation of Mexican culture in the United States, their style changed. This gradual transformation reflected their awareness of other artistic trends as artists in both the United States and Mexico increasingly turned to abstraction as the twentieth century continued.

While joys of life like music, physical beauty, dance, flirtation, and even libations are celebrated in his mural at the Bar Andaluz, the third area of murals by Ramos Martínez is more classical, and ideas of romantic love and intimacy are prevalent. In six individual murals again situated behind a bar area, the artist's works contrast the dark wood that dominates the bar through his presentation of delicately painted bodies in compositions steeped in allegory. The women, many of whom exhibit red hair and porcelain skin, pose seductively and convey themes of innocence, temptation, and seduction.

Beyond the murals of Ramos Martínez, the setting of the casino makes a strong impression. High painted ceilings with geometric designs on dark wood that are attributed to Ramos Martínez and stark stucco white walls dominate the interior decoration. While today new construction blocks the ocean view, in the casino's prime,

the ocean and beach were able to be seen and used. While the cashier windows remain, some fixtures and art have been added to the complex over time. For most part though, the decorations are sparse and white walls dominate the scene.³⁸³

The acceptance of a commission for a place of leisure was not unusual among the Mexican muralists. During the summer of 1936, Rivera famously agreed to paint a mural cycle for Alberto Pani, a wealthy businessman, who had collected the artist's work for a number of years.³⁸⁴ He commissioned Rivera to create new large-scale work for his planned Hotel Alameda on the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. Like Ramos Martínez's project in Ensenada, Rivera's murals were created for a space that was built with the intention of attracting American visitors. The identification of these places as locations that were planned to function as the domain of foreigners did not completely determine the style and subject matter pursued by these artists, but it certainly informed the murals they ultimately finished for these spaces. Once again, American money was linked with the Mexican modernists and their portrayals of Mexican culture.

Back in his new home, Ramos Martínez also created works for private residences in Los Angeles; for example, in 1933, he agreed to paint a mural entitled *Guelaguetza* in the home of Jo Swerling (1897–1964), a well-known Hollywood screenwriter. Swerling, from the 1920s through the 1950s participated in the writing of some of the most legendary American films such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *It's a Wonderful Life*

³⁸³ The life of the building has been notable. After the casino was closed in 1938, it underwent military occupation. Later, it returned to a hotel and it is currently a cultural center. While the Bar Andaluz is still a functioning saloon six days a week and a small bookstore and museum occupy the space, without a special event, the entire complex can seem sleepy and practically forgotten. The murals themselves are in remarkably good condition, perhaps in part due to the fact that the space has been largely ignored for many years. The murals have survived the upheavals of ownership, military occupation, and the natural deterioration that occurs over time.

³⁸⁴ Wolfe, 349.

(1946), and *Guys and Dolls* (1955). Ramos Martínez was taken with popular art and indigenous customs and this aesthetic appealed to Swerling and several prominent collectors in Los Angeles. The term “Guelaguetza” refers to an indigenous celebration that is held annually in late July in the city of Oaxaca and surrounding communities in Southern Mexico. The celebration involves traditional music, costume, food, and allows for different groups within the community to demonstrate their varied practices. Swerling’s home in Los Angeles was eventually destroyed, but art dealer Bryce Bannatyne intervened and saved the mural from destruction in 1991.³⁸⁵ Today the mural rests in a shed on a farm in central California, and few people are able to view it.³⁸⁶

D. Santa Barbara

Commissioned to create a mural cycle for the chapel at the cemetery in Santa Barbara, Ramos Martínez used the opportunity to meld his distinctive style, his passion for murals, and a deep connection to his faith (fig. 72). The location of the small chapel is breathtaking, as the cemetery where it is located possesses sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and nearby mountains. Ramos Martínez’s wife later wrote this poetic description of the murals in the chapel, “The frescoes are among his most notable works. Every atom of his artistic faith, knowledge and strength, he incorporated into the composition, which is at once an expression of the love of his art and his love of God.”³⁸⁷ Here, Sodi de Ramos Martínez recognizes that this commission results in the melding of Ramos

³⁸⁵ Lorenza Muñoz, “Buried under the Wallpaper Art: Demolition project unearths one of a series of frescoes and helps renew interest in Alfredo Ramos Martinez,” *The Los Angeles Times*. December 18, 1999.

³⁸⁶ Its present owner hopes that a museum will acquire the piece which will be helpful in furthering the education of the public about Ramos Martínez who even in his second home of Southern California remains under-recognized.

³⁸⁷ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 34.

Martínez's primary passions, art and religion. Without a doubt, upon entering the small nondescript chapel located a few miles from the center of Santa Barbara, the immediate power of the mural cycle is revealed as the raised hands of God welcome the visitor.

This commission for Santa Barbara was the idea of Mary Smith and Henry Eichheim (1870–1942). Smith was the widow of the architect, George Washington Smith (1876–1930), who designed the Chapel. Eichheim was a talented violist and a composer. Both established a strong friendship with the artist and they would remain his patrons. Given the artist's close relationship with the architect's widow, the way in which Ramos Martínez's Santa Barbara mural cycle works seamlessly with the architecture of the chapel, is not surprising. The delicate symmetry between Ramos Martínez's mural and the architectural design of the space and the painted areas—that cover and activate both small corners and crevices and dominate large walls—demonstrate the artist's sensitivity to the architectural space. During the same year he created the mural cycle for the chapel, Ramos Martínez created a small mural, *Los Guardines* for the other patron of the chapel. At the Henry Eichheim residence in Montecito, California, an exclusive community adjacent to Santa Barbara (fig. 73), Ramos Martínez painted a decorative mural that portrayed a Mexican man and woman situated on either side of a doorway. To create the work, he used the gardener and the maid who worked for Eichheim as models.

Sodi de Ramos Martínez continues her powerful description of the murals for the Santa Barbara Cemetery, "A procession of monks, nuns and women of all nations are moving in the direction of 'God, the Resurrection and the Life,' white lilies comprise the offerings that they are carrying and the same flowers adorn the arches of the dome and

are held in the hands of the angels.”³⁸⁸ Sodi de Ramos Martínez adds a sense of drama to her description by using the term “nuns and women of all nations” as most of the women pictured in Ramos Martínez’s mural have pale skin and blond hair. The angular forms used to represent the nuns and the friars give the mural cycle a modern sensibility (fig. 74). In portraying the religious, ornate detail is spared, with the exception of the white lilies that form a considerable horizontal line across the composition. Around the time that Ramos Martínez completed this mural, he created a number of small-scale works that also represented the clergy and served as studies for his larger mural project. With *Friars and Nuns*, c.1934, the artist presented four nuns facing three monks (fig. 75). One of the nuns kneels on the ground in prayer. Prayer was a part of Ramos Martínez daily life, and he once stated, “Every night I go down on my knees to thank the dear God that he has made me do nothing all my long life but paint.”³⁸⁹ Behind the religious figures, the loosely defined architectural space that included a series of arches and the dark blue sky in the background exudes a surrealist sensibility. This piece was exhibited as a part of the California Pacific International Exposition in Balboa Park in San Diego in 1935.

Again, Sodi de Ramos Martínez proceeds with her poignant description of the Santa Barbara cycle, “‘Grief-stricken Humanity’—a group of large heads bent by the weight of sorrow and covering their faces with their hands symbolizes mortal suffering and misery. Before them, ‘The Christ of Peace,’ like a spiritual consolation, extends his hands to those who weep for the loved ones that they have lost.”³⁹⁰ The most theatrical moment revealed in the mural cycle exists in the juxtaposition of a group of people,

³⁸⁸ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 34.

³⁸⁹ A.M. (signed A.M., likely Arthur Millier), “Martínez’s Art Reflects his Religion,” *Los Angeles Times*. Date unknown. Scrapbook. The Santa Barbara Historical Museum Archives.

³⁹⁰ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 34.

representing parishioners, sinners, and the unfettered masses, who place their hands before their faces and hang their heads low expressing through gestures the agony they experience (fig. 76). Indeed, Ramos Martínez depicts this group of people as humble and obedient before the eyes of God. In the mural, a representation of Christ, with hands extended upwards welcomes the people to worship (fig. 77). The drama described above is mitigated by the muted color palette chosen by the artist.

E. Mary, Star of the Sea

Three years after he completed the Santa Barbara mural cycle, Ramos Martínez was offered another opportunity for a spiritually-focused project. His second fresco mural portraying a religious theme was for the church of Mary, Star of the Sea in La Jolla in 1937, the same year he began the mural for the Avenida Café (fig. 78).³⁹¹ Completed on the façade of the church above the front door, the mural was straightforward and without ornate detail. The architect of the church was Carleton Monroe Winslow who first came to San Diego in 1915 to participate in the Panama California Exposition.³⁹²

The commission at Mary, Star of the Sea was prompted by Dr. Jesse Albert Locke and supervised by Father McNamara, the head priest of the church from 1935 to 1939. This church was the second Catholic church built on the site. The first church was built in 1904, when there were approximately 150 Catholic families living in La Jolla.³⁹³ The

³⁹¹ The church complex is at the corner of Girard and Kline Avenues in La Jolla. The Pacific Ocean is accessible just a few blocks away from the church.

³⁹² La Jolla Historical Society. Carleton Monroe Winslow Folder.

³⁹³ From *Diamond Anniversary, 1906-1981, Mary Star of the Sea, La Jolla, California*. Published in 1982. Unpaginated. Folder for Mary, Star of the Sea. La Jolla Historical Society.

dedication of the new church was on December 5, 1937.³⁹⁴ Winslow was an experienced architect with a strong reputation and he maintained offices in both Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. Similar to the exterior of the church, the interior is both simple and restrained. The ceiling possesses exposed wood beams and dark wooden pews.

The mural depicted Mary with a star behind her and ocean water at her feet with two angels on either side. The palette of the mural possessed the soft brown hues, a color choice originated in Ramos Martínez's amber tinged landscapes in Europe. In contrast to the restrained color palette that dominates the composition, the blue of the ocean adds a sense of vibrancy to the mural. Few historic photographs exist of the work. This mural did not last because its condition quickly deteriorated due partially to its proximity to the ocean and the salt air. A portion of the work fell from the façade of the church. Today, a mosaic mural has replaced the original Ramos Martínez work. Though realized in a different medium, the church commissioned the mosaic artist to create a work that retained the composition of Ramos Martínez's mural and covered the portions of the damaged fresco that remained on the façade of the church.

This relatively small mural for Mary, Star of the Sea is reminiscent of the church aesthetic that Charlot strived for in the United States. By the time Ramos Martínez created this mural, he had already developed several significant projects and had been honored with noteworthy museum exhibitions. La Jolla remains a small beach town today (albeit an upscale one). Perhaps encouraged by the hopes of economic benefit from private collectors, Ramos Martínez came from Los Angeles to La Jolla to paint a fresco

³⁹⁴ Originally the church served both La Jolla and the Pacific Beach area of San Diego until 1940 when St. Brigid's Parish in Pacific Beach was founded. In 1959, a second Catholic church in La Jolla, All Hallow's Parish, was built.

for the small church.³⁹⁵ From 1937 to 1938, Ramos Martínez traveled frequently back and forth from Los Angeles to San Diego as he completed two murals in small towns, La Jolla and Coronado that both bordered San Diego.

F. La Avenida Café

After the La Jolla mural was complete, Ramos Martínez began an extensive project the following year for Albert Bram of Coronado, California, the proprietor of a local restaurant named La Avenida Café, situated across from the elegant Hotel del Coronado. Bram visited Ramos Martínez's apartment in Los Angeles and convinced him to take the commission for which he was paid \$1,000 by Bram to complete five separate murals for the Avenida Café.³⁹⁶ Two of the five individual murals did not survive, one is in the collection of Hollywood film producer Joel Silver in Palm Springs, California, and the other two are on view at the Coronado Public Library.

To serve Bram's clientele, Ramos Martínez chose some of his favorite subjects for the largest of the five frescoes; women carrying flowers populate the mural entitled *Market Day*, 1938 (fig. 79). The depiction of women with flowers dates back to his representations in Mexico after returning from Europe, and they figure prominently in his Ensenada murals. In California, however, these women begin to look quite different from their predecessors. In earlier representations, the flowers had generally served as a symbol of the depicted women's femininity, but in the Coronado mural the flowers function more as signifiers of a cultural tradition and as a mechanism for portraying

³⁹⁵ The 1940 census of La Jolla stated that the population was 5,438. From *Diamond Anniversary, 1906-1981, Mary Star of the Sea, La Jolla, California*. Published in 1982. Unpaginated. Folder for Mary, Star of the Sea. La Jolla Historical Society.

³⁹⁶ Unsigned/undated statement written by the grandchildren of Albert Bram, "Historical Appreciation of Location, Romaine Salad and Ramos Martínez Murals," Coronado Historical Society.

indigenous life to an American audience. In *Market Day*, thirteen women are depicted; five are oriented to the right, while eight face the left. Beyond the women a wall fills in a majority of the background, along with a vibrant blue used to represent the sky and lush green hues that define the lush leaves of palm trees. Within the wall that makes up much of the background there are a few spare diagonal lines that give the mural a sense of dimension. These lines are typically found in both the artist's large and small-scale works. Most of the women appear to be walking, suggesting a procession to the market. Seven of the women balance flowers and fruit on the top of their heads, and one carries a number of flowers on her back. Despite the fact that the overall color palette includes soft white and brown shades, the blue in the background and the green make up the strongest hues. The subject matter might seem trivial, but in reality these women are engaged in labor as they prepare and carry their goods to be sold in the market. By presenting them as working, Ramos Martínez aligns himself with the people. This support reflects the leftist politics that were prevalent in Los Angeles and the Socialist impulse common among many artists; however, Ramos Martínez's inclination to portray the people was bound by his faith and current trends among Mexican modernists working in the United States. In the mural, several of the women wear skirts with horizontal stripes and a couple of them reveal long braids that are tied at the ends with ribbons. The dress and hairstyle along with their jobs, suggest that they are women of native heritage. Although slight facial distinctions exist such as the shape of the face or eyebrows, the women appear similar. Their feet are nearly identical and the outline of their bodies forms a geometric pattern. The common physical experience among the women relates the emphasis on community in most indigenous communities in Mexico and mimics the nature of the

mural itself, a visual record of Mexican culture to be experienced by the community of Coronado.

The mural, *Market Day*, marks a vigorous development in Ramos Martínez's body of work in which he embraces the native flower seller, one of his favorite archetypes, in a public, large-scale project. Now seven years removed from the mural created for wealthy American and Mexican tourists in Ensenada and just three years from the minimalistic religious cycle in Santa Barbara, the artist returns to creating public work in a commercial setting. The work satisfies the American tastemakers who favored romanticized views of Mexican culture. The American collector functions as the colonizer whose money dictates the way in which the politically disadvantaged Mexican is portrayed.

Ramos Martínez's mural for La Avenida Café provided a dynamic backdrop to visitors at the local eatery. The mural, which was located in the main dining room, faced the entrance of the restaurant and must have made a bold impression to all who entered the establishment. The mural was situated above three passageways which remain evident by the mural's configuration. While the work offered a dramatic introduction to patrons of the restaurant, the story of how the mural was saved was equally intriguing. When the Café was still in operation, the mural, which was located in the main dining room, was damaged due to the fumes from the kitchen, smoke from the guests, and the regular deterioration that occurs when a mural is located in a busy, public venue. After the Café closed the mural remained, though it continued to fall into disrepair until Gus and Barbara Theberge bought the property in Coronado that included the mural. Local preservationists expressed deep concern over the fate of the mural following the purchase

of the property. The Theberges paid to have the mural safely removed from the property in the middle of the night to avoid protests from community activists, and funded the restoration of the work. They ultimately gave it to the city of Coronado.³⁹⁷

G. Scripps College

In addition to accepting various commissions in the United States, Ramos Martínez remained committed to endorsing Mexican muralism in the United States. Ramos Martínez, along with the American artist Millard Sheets (1907–1989), promoted the presence of Siqueiros in Los Angeles. Sheets, who would eventually become the Director of the prestigious Otis Art Institute, was an influential friend to Mexican muralism in the United States. It was Sheets who secured Ramos Martínez's last commission at Scripps College. Beyond teaching and his support of other artists, Sheets also produced his own murals.³⁹⁸

As mentioned previously, Ramos Martínez left his final mural project unfinished with three of the nine panels appearing outwardly in progress. The mural cycle, *The Flower Vendors*, 1945–6 was made at the Margaret Fowler Garden, a walled space adorned with wisteria arbors on the east side of the campus of Scripps College in Claremont, California (fig. 80).³⁹⁹ *The Flower Vendors* combines two of Ramos

³⁹⁷ The building that housed La Avenida Café still exists, though it has undergone a major transformation and a restaurant by the name of Bistro d'Asia now occupies the space.

³⁹⁸ One of his most famous works involved religious imagery. Popularly known as *Touchdown Jesus*, Sheets's mural, *Word of Life*, 1964 consists of mosaic pieces assembled to form Sheets's vision of a large Christ figure on the side of the library at Notre Dame. The nickname derives from the fact that the mural is visible from the football field and with Christ's hands raised it appears that the figure celebrates athletic achievement. The gesture of hands raised is made by a referee after a football player has successfully completed a touchdown, therefore, the name "Touchdown Jesus" was used when describing the mural by Notre Dame football fans.

³⁹⁹ The idyllic setting includes small fountains, sculptures, and a corner chapel. Conservators from the Getty Conservation Institute have performed extensive work on the murals.

Martínez's most common representations, female flower sellers and close-up portraits of women. Of the nine different panels, five of them depict flower vendors. The vendors in terms of physical shape, dress, and the flowers they carry closely resemble the artist's mural for the Avenida Café. They differ slightly from the flower vendors in the Avenida Café mural as the women are represented against a much more robust landscape with mountains. Two panels, incidentally two of the unfinished panels, are magnified portraits of individual women (fig. 81). The panels that are situated at either end of the total composition and are positioned around doorways, portray native landscape and animals. The panel on the right side is dominated by enlarged leaves of the maguey plant with an armadillo resting amidst the natural environment (fig. 82). While this large-scale project exemplifies the most notable work by the artist at Scripps, a small tile work, also portraying flower vendors, exists within the courtyard of another nearby building. Located just west of the garden, this tile work by Ramos Martínez is in the courtyard of Janet Jacks Balch Hall, an administrative building at Scripps College.

H. Other Works

The murals outlined previously relate quite closely to the artist's other works. Like Charlot, Ramos Martínez had favorite types of iconography that he readily repeated throughout his career. For example, Charlot often portrayed the traditional Mexican kitchen, while Ramos Martínez frequently presented flower vendors. In between the large-scale mural commissions, Ramos Martínez made oil canvases and works on paper with a variety of techniques including gouache and pastel. After moving to the United States, Ramos Martínez began to create small-scale portraits of indigenous women, very similar in terms of subject and composition to two of the panels from the Scripps project.

The artist frequently portrayed women with their hair in braids and often ribbons decorated their hair in keeping with the native custom. Across the board, the women featured in these works appear serious, bold, and by staring straightforward they actively return the gaze of the viewer. With *Mancacoyota*, 1930, Ramos Martínez painted a portrait of an indigenous woman with braids that hang below her shoulders, a yellow blouse, and a dark green necklace (fig. 83). Although the necklace is not completely revealed, the sizable green beads and a central adornment of that hangs from the beads are evocative of traditional Mexican jewelry. In the background, a budding green cactus with red and yellow flowers fills in the composition. A work with a similar approach from around the same year is the artist's *Woman from Tehuantepec* (fig. 84). In this painting, nearly the entire composition consists of the woman's face, and like the previous work, the woman depicted here exchanges the viewer's gaze. *Woman from Tehuantepec* differs from *Mancacoyota*, in that paint is applied much more thinly and the surface itself appears flatter, whereas the brushstrokes used in *Mancacoyota* are more expressionistic and the depiction of the woman's face and the cacti that delineate the background appear more multidimensional. In *Woman from Tehuantepec*, the artist recreates the effect of light across the woman's face to establish dimension. The woman's hair stays together in braids, but these are tied on top of her head and accentuated with ribbons. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is located within the state of Oaxaca, this is also the region of Mexico where Ramos Martínez's wife was from. Ramos Martínez was not overly familiar with the indigenous women from this region; however, they were frequent muses of both Mexican modernists and American artists who traveled to Mexico in part

for their adherence to traditional dress customs and the way in which their society allowed for women to participate in both political and economic decisions.

The majority of the work by Ramos Martínez discussed in this chapter relates to the artist's depiction of indigenous culture, with the exception of his religious murals for the Santa Barbara Cemetery and Mary, Star of the Sea in La Jolla. The artist was also dedicated to making small-scale representations of Catholic iconography, for example the *Virgin of San Juan*, c. 1940 (fig. 85). By looking at some of Ramos Martínez's portrayals of indigenous culture alongside Catholic culture, similarities can be seen between these two different types of iconography which perhaps reveal the way in which the artist envisioned these supposedly dissimilar types of iconography in a similar manner. In one of Ramos Martínez's few depictions of violence, *The Bondage of War*, c. 1939 a young man appears naked and a rope binds him (fig. 86). The man's hair appears slightly disheveled, and his eyes look downward as his head slumps over. In a later portrait entitled *Christus*, 1943, the Christ figure's head rests downward and the body is confined by ropes as well (fig. 87). Both the man and Christ have shadows under their eyes and along their faces that emphasize the physical pain they endure. Another provocative comparison involves Ramos Martínez's interest in representations of motherhood. With *Madonna and Child*, c. 1934, a gentle and sweet Mary cradles baby Jesus (fig. 88). Both the Christ child and Mary have halos over their heads, and a faint *mandorla* surrounds the head and back of Mary. The edges of the work are dark, but overall the small painting presents three different shades of sepia-toned color. Similarly the artist's *Tender Love*, c. 1934 depicts a quiet, intimate moment between a mother and child (fig. 89). While the newspaper that the image is painted on declares the fate of the latest

business deals, the caring moment between mother and child appears far removed from any real life concerns.⁴⁰⁰ The delicate way in which the mother reaches her hand to the face of her child mimics the manner that the Virgin Mary reaches toward baby Jesus.

Ramos Martínez made many traditional images of the Virgin Mary that evoked European depictions of the same subject matter in works like *Madonna and Child*, c.1932, and *Pietà*, c.1932 (figs.90–1). Reproductions of European images had been available in Mexico since the sixteenth century. Moreover, lithographs representing Italian Baroque paintings were widely circulated in inexpensive editions during the twentieth century and provided certain artists with sources for inspiration.⁴⁰¹ Ramos Martínez, being from a wealthy Catholic family and continuing his own faith practice as an adult, would have been aware of such prints. Although the artist shied away from making his own prints, after his death, Ramos Martínez's wife continued to produce some prints to help support herself. Though one distinct way in which Ramos Martínez's *Madonna and Child* and *Pietà* differ from traditional representations of the Virgin Mary is evident in the topography presented in the background. Both works present rocky mountains that are typical of the geography of Northern Mexico and the Southwest portion of the United States. In these representations, the artist locates the sacred image of Mary within a landscape far removed from Europe. The works are steeped in hybridity, a condition of multiple cultural influences coming together to create something entirely new. Hybridity occurs regularly in the art produced by artists who cross the

⁴⁰⁰ The relationship between the written text in Ramos Martínez's newspaper works and the rendered image will be further addressed in Chapter V as a part of the discussion of the ways in which Charlot and Ramos Martínez had subliminal social justice objectives.

⁴⁰¹ Deffebach, "Grain of Memory: María Izquierdo's Images of Altars for *Viernes de Dolores*." XXVIII *Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, ed. Peter Kreiger (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2005), 206.

US/Mexico Border. Ramos Martínez borrows from the European-derived representation of Mary, heavily circulated in the colonial period in Mexico and a part of the contemporary cultural fabric of Mexico and combines it with references to a geographic destination that is not specifically known but seems to suggest the border region.

Understanding the relationship to the border region and specifically his California legacy remains complex and more research will illuminate the way in which he was affected by the community of artists in Los Angeles and how he affected others with his distinctive artistic vision. Margarita Nieto, a leading Ramos Martínez scholar, contends that the artist was inspired by sculpture in Los Angeles, particularly by the work of George Stanley (1913–1973) and that it was Stanley’s representations of the figural form as abstract experimentations with volume that inspired the artist.⁴⁰² Stanley was well-connected in the Los Angeles area as he studied at Otis Institute of Art and Design, participated in the Federal Art Project, and later taught at Chouinard. Ramos Martínez’s *Charros in a Village*, completed in approximately 1941, possesses a vibrant color palette of blue, red, and orange hues that are typical of the artist’s later work (fig. 92). It is also representative of the artist’s exploration of volume and perspective in California that differ from his earlier works.⁴⁰³ The round horses, *sombreros*, and hills that delineate the countryside are different from the earlier representations of friars and monks at the Santa Barbara Cemetery. The angular, flat forms have been replaced by a preference to rounded figural ones. This change might reflect the influence of Stanley as Nieto hypothesizes or

⁴⁰² Margarita Nieto, *Una visión retrospectiva*, 91–92.

⁴⁰³ One of the more interesting aspects of this particular work is the remnants of another *charro* on horseback that has been painted over by the artist. Likely Ramos Martínez changed his mind about the composition and chose not to completely abandon the work and start over, instead a hint of the previously figure makes for a mysterious presence in the painting.

it might be inspired by the rounded forms of the Mexican muralist Rivera, whose work was popular in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. As a Mexican painter living in Los Angeles, Ramos Martínez had access to stylistic trends among both American and Mexican modernists. More than likely, his increasing experiments with volume were a product of influences he was exposed to in both Mexico and the United States. He gleaned influence from American artists like Stanley, while he was simultaneously aware of the rounded figural forms of Rivera's murals and Rivera's success in gaining high profile commissions in New York, San Francisco, and Detroit. Ramos Martínez responded to these diverse influences and negotiated his own identity and the identity of the Mexico he portrayed through the lens of both Mexican and American inspiration.

I. Reception of Works

Just as Ramos Martínez was poised to leave Mexico for the United States, an important gift of his work foretold the many significant connections the artist would make in his new home of California. The gift was initiated in June 1929 when then President Emilio Portes Gil (1890–1978) chose a painting by Ramos Martínez as a wedding gift for Charles Lindbergh, the famed aviator and Anne Morrow, the daughter of the US Ambassador to Mexico, Dwight Morrow.⁴⁰⁴ Morrow and Lindbergh, who at the time was one of the best-known individuals in the Western Hemisphere, had met in Mexico.

Ramos Martínez's early connections with prominent figures in both Europe and Mexico continued in the United States as a number of important Americans based in Los Angeles were drawn to his work. Harold Grieve (1901–1993) was an interior designer

⁴⁰⁴ Karen Cordero, *Una visión retrospectiva*, 64.

and also a former art director for Warner Brothers. With his support, Ramos Martínez benefited immensely from a financial point of view as Grieve bought many works and encouraged his well-connected colleagues to do the same; for example, actors Charles Laughton (1899–1962) and Beulah Bondi (1888–1981) also purchased works.⁴⁰⁵

Despite these relationships, however, Ramos Martínez had his limits with the Hollywood set. A Hollywood collector once asked Ramos Martínez to decorate the ceilings of his home with copies of well-known Renaissance works of art, but Ramos Martínez refused.⁴⁰⁶ Although he benefited immensely from the support of his celebrity-connected patrons, he refused any commissions that prevented him from a certain level of creativity and that betrayed his own signature style.

Ramos Martínez gained many distinguished admirers among the art establishment in California. The Directors of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art (now the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego (now The San Diego Museum of Art) organized exhibitions for the Mexican painter and spoke favorably of his work.⁴⁰⁷ Reginald Poland, Director of The San Diego Museum of Art, was particularly impressed with the Santa Barbara mural. After Ramos Martínez's death, he wrote, "A work of art either does or does not have meaning for each of us. It has been one of my great pleasures to own some of the work of Martínez and to share it with others. It is generally conceded that his frescoes in the cemetery chapel at Santa Barbara are among the most distinguished examples of wall painting in this country. In

⁴⁰⁵ *Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Modernismo*, 51.

⁴⁰⁶ Small, 112.

⁴⁰⁷ *Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Modernismo*, 49.

this form we see Martínez at the height of his powers.”⁴⁰⁸ Reginald Poland developed a strong relationship with the artist and following Ramos Martínez’s 1931 exhibition at the Museum, the acquisition of two Ramos Martínez paintings by The San Diego Museum of Art in 1932, marked the first works by a Latin American artist in the Museum’s collection.

Buoyed by the support of two directors, Ramos Martínez was able to find steady success in Southern California. A series of exhibitions at prominent California art institutions solidified Ramos Martínez’s significance on the West Coast. During the 1930s, he exhibited at the Assistance League Art Gallery, the Faulkner Memorial Art Gallery, and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art. The 1931 exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art was held at Exposition Park. During April of 1933 an exhibition of the artist’s work was held at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. This show provided Ramos Martínez with the opportunity to meet Albert Bender, who was one of the most active collectors of Mexican art.⁴⁰⁹ Bender quickly appreciated Ramos Martínez’s work and purchased several paintings and placed them in various collections. Bender’s purchases included: *El Indio Solitario* for the Legion of Honor, *El Prisonero* for the San Francisco Museum of Art, *Three Sisters* for the gallery at Mills College, and *Padre Junipero Serra* for the California Historical Society.⁴¹⁰ Later, Bender gave Ramos Martínez’s *Zapatistas*, c. 1932 to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Following several purchases, Ramos Martínez

⁴⁰⁸ Reginald Poland, “An Appreciation,” in María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, trans. Berta de Lecuona (Los Angeles, CA: Martínez Foundation, 1949), 44.

⁴⁰⁹ Bender collected an extraordinary amount of important Mexican art. He gave many of his most important pieces to the San Francisco Museum of Art, now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).

⁴¹⁰ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 34.

wrote Bender inquiring whether the collector knew others who might be interested in his work.⁴¹¹ He also communicated with Bender about the possibility of a mural commission in San Francisco that was never realized.⁴¹²

While Ramos Martínez's exhibitions were successful in terms of the often illustrious spaces in which they were held and critically well-received, the artist's acclaim remained within the state of California. This barrier that prevents further knowledge of Ramos Martínez's work continues to exist in terms of the presence of the artist's work in museum collections and its availability in top-tier galleries on the East Coast and other parts of the United States outside of California. Furthermore, reference to his work remains absent from many books on both modern art of the United States and Mexico.⁴¹³ In her assessment of Ramos Martínez's work, Karen Cordero, the highly regarded modern art historian, stated that he was a painter of ladies and flowers and that his greatest contributions were his roles as Director of the Academy and the Open-Air Schools as opposed to his artistic output.⁴¹⁴

J. Educating Others

During 1940, Ramos Martínez was invited to teach a fresco class at The San Diego Museum of Art. As previously mentioned, the Museum's Director Reginald

⁴¹¹ Alfredo Ramos Martínez to Albert Bender. 24 January 1939, Albert Bender Papers. Mills College. Oakland, California.

⁴¹² Alfredo Ramos Martínez to Albert Bender. 17 July 1933, Albert Bender Papers. Mills College. Oakland, California.

⁴¹³ Inclusive texts like Frances K. Pohl's *Framing American: A Social History of America Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002) and David Bjelajac's *American Art: A Cultural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) neglects to mention either artist. Edward Sullivan's *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Phaidon, 2000) and Jacqueline Barnitz's *Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) survey texts on Latin American art only mention the artist in terms of his work at the Open Air Schools. Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) does not mention the artist at all.

⁴¹⁴ Cordero, 63.

Poland was a supporter of the artist. Students in Ramos Martínez's fresco class included the noted San Diego art promoter, collector, and artist Alice Klauber (1871–1951).⁴¹⁵ Though Ramos Martínez emphasized his knowledge of fresco, his students created work in a variety of different media. At the end of the six-week class Ramos Martínez held an exhibition of his students' work.⁴¹⁶ Klauber was a great champion of both the American and Asian art collections at The San Diego Museum of Art.⁴¹⁷ Her notes from Ramos Martínez's lecture at the Museum are the only formal documentation of the class and provide further testimony to her varied involvement and commitment to art in San Diego.

Communicating information about fresco technique was popular among the American artists who had knowledge of the technique. Many artists enthusiastically shared with one another their ideas about fresco-making. In October 18, 1935, Reuben Kadish wrote to Harold Lehman,

Here is the dope on fresco: (of course I don't remember everything at the spur of the moment but I will give you as much as I can)
For lime fresco: use hydrated lime in the putty state or dry state. The putty state lime is the best for fresco. The longer the lime has been slacking the better it is. If you can get the lime that has aged for years there is nothing better. The commercial stuff us usually only about 15 days old. Buy your lime as soon as you can and see to it that it is at least covered with a few inches of water, at all times. Never let the water dry out completely. This will give you the oldest you can get.⁴¹⁸

Ramos Martínez was a part of a movement of artists who shared their knowledge about fresco with others and who contributed to the widespread use of the medium. The murals

⁴¹⁵ Alice Klauber's notes from Alfredo Ramos Martínez's fresco class at The San Diego Museum of Art. July 13, 1940. The San Diego Museum of Art Archives.

⁴¹⁶ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 36.

⁴¹⁷ She organized the groundbreaking exhibition of American art in San Diego for the 1915 Panama California exhibition held at Balboa Park. This exhibition was co-organized by Robert Henri and marked the first official showing of leading American artists like George Bellows and John Sloan in San Diego.

⁴¹⁸ Reuben Kadish to Harold Lehman, 18 October 1935, Harold Lehman Estate, Los Angeles, California.

that resulted from fresco technique were agents of social expression for many artists on both sides of the border in the first half of the twentieth century.

American painters Kadish and Lehman shared Ramos Martínez's passion for fresco painting, but they were both influenced by another Mexican muralist in Los Angeles, David Alfaro Siqueiros. While working in Taxco, Mexico, Siqueiros secured a six-month visa to L.A. Unlike his former teacher Ramos Martínez, Siqueiros's time in L.A. was brief, he was only there for seven months during 1932, but he made a dramatic impact on the city.⁴¹⁹ The first of the three murals created by Siqueiros in L.A., *Street Meeting*, was at the Chouinard School. This mural was produced outdoors using the fresco technique with a few technical twists. Siqueiros used cement as opposed to plaster and a spray can to apply some of the paint. Another mural, *Portrait of México Today (Delivery of the Mexican Bourgeoisie Born of the Revolution into the Hands of Imperialism)*, was created for the film director Dudley Murphy (1897–1968).⁴²⁰ The last mural was the most infamous. Though currently under renovation as a part of an initiative led by the Getty Institute, the mural was hardly seen by the public as its controversial content was quickly whitewashed.⁴²¹ In this final mural project, *América Tropical*, 1932 Siqueiros used religious iconography to make a powerful political statement. Indeed, *América Tropical*, made with a spray gun technique and using black cement ground, was by far Siqueiros most controversial project in Los Angeles.

⁴¹⁹ For more information see: Shifra Goldman's groundbreaking essay, "Siqueiros and Three Early Murals in Los Angeles," *Art Journal* (Summer 1974): 321-27.

⁴²⁰ This mural was later purchased by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

⁴²¹ The work on the mural not only includes conservation work, but also a viewing deck so that visitors will be able to easily view the mural. Both projects are scheduled to be completed in 2012.

Siqueiros produced *América Tropical* on Olvera Street, a storied avenue that was originally a constructed space by Anglo Americans to represent the Mexican American community in L.A. Created under much secrecy Siqueiros's mural depicted a Mexican migrant worker crucified on a cross. Approximately thirty American artists assisted Siqueiros in the creation of this piece.⁴²² Siqueiros's experience in Los Angeles, and in particular, the creation of his mural *América Tropical*, offers a point of comparison with the work created by Ramos Martínez in Los Angeles. Los Angeles presents a fecund geographic space to understand how Mexican culture, and particularly relevant to this study, how art depicting Mexican culture was received in the United States. However, Los Angeles is not simply a microcosm of attitudes in the United States, and perhaps in no other city in the country are the ideas of this inquiry more complicated.

One year after both Ramos Martínez and Charlot arrived in Los Angeles, a revamped Olvera Street was unveiled in downtown Los Angeles. Olvera Street has been historically viewed as the birthplace of Mexican identity in Los Angeles. Ironically, the revitalization plan was led by Anglo Americans and in particular, by Christine Sterling. Olvera Street reinforced the idea of a quaint and romantic Mexican culture. This view of Mexico related to the aspects of Mexico represented by both Ramos Martínez and Charlot. In describing the environment of Olvera Street, William D. Estrada wrote, "The theme was "old Mexico," pitting a timeless, romantic, homogenous Spanish-Mexican culture against industrialization, immigration, urban decay and modernity itself."⁴²³ This evaluation can also be applied to Ramos Martínez's repetition of flower sellers in his

⁴²² Elsa Roco, "David Alfaro Siqueiros," *Parnassus* (April 1934), 6.

⁴²³ William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles's Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no.2 (Winter 1999):107.

work as they typically appear as romanticized female forms untouched by modernity and represented without much individual character. Estrada continued with his analysis of Olvera Street writing, “As a constructed space, Olvera Street was the product of a social and economic agenda established by civil elites to transform downtown Los Angeles through the removal of undesirable residents.”⁴²⁴ Similarly, Ramos Martínez’s murals were “constructed spaces” that did not reflect reality and they were typically funded by wealthy individuals. Despite these criticisms, Ramos Martínez’s work and Sterling’s revamped Olvera Street were able to insert representations of Mexican identity into American visual culture. Though in hindsight these representations may seem far from reality and not very modern, they were a part of an important movement to recognize Mexican culture during the twentieth century in the United States and without these early efforts, today’s more nuanced representation of Mexico would not have been possible. Furthermore, it now seems appropriate to return to art historian Caroline Klarr’s assertion quoted in Chapter II, which stated that Charlot’s work was groundbreaking because it represented minority populations in spaces owned and operated by modern colonizers. The constructed images of Mexican identity created by Ramos Martínez and promoted by Sterling also did this. Ramos Martínez’s commissions for wealthy patrons like Jo Swerling and his Santa Barbara Cemetery mural cycle position indigenous culture in spaces where it is routinely excluded. Olvera Street is located in downtown Los Angeles, close to Union Station, not far from City Hall, and in proximity to many business offices. Sterling’s Olvera Street usurped the typical identity of a place associated with a

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

government or financial center and reinforced its status as the location where el Pueblo de los Angeles was originally founded.

After Ramos Martínez arrived in California, he would only return to Mexico for work. As previously mentioned, he quickly crossed the international border between Mexico and the United States to accept a commission for the hotel and casino in Ensenada. From 1942 to 1945, he worked in Mexico City on a mural cycle for the Normal School for Teachers in Mexico. The commission was offered by Licenciado Vejar Vásquez, the Minister of Education.⁴²⁵ The mural included portraits of Justo Sierra (1848–1912), General Álvaro Obregón (1880–1928), and José Vasconcelos. The mural portrayed an ancient rite with the mountains of Monte Albán in the background, and a portrait of a large female, indigenous head situated above the doors to the library.⁴²⁶ Unfortunately, this mural was later destroyed; a tragic event especially considering this was the only representation of the artist's late work in Mexico.

As has been previously hinted, Ramos Martínez garnered great respect from his peers, particularly the artists whom he met on both sides of the US/Mexico Border. Federico Cantú, a prominent Mexican painter, gave the following statement to Ramos Martínez's wife, "As you know, I have a great curiosity for his technique and I must thank you again for graciously showing me that series of little treasures by Martínez. They aroused my jealousy, both as a pupil and as a Mexican, for I had to admit that he left in California the most mature accomplishments of his fruitful talent."⁴²⁷ Cantú was a close friend of Charlot's as well and all three artists shared in common a commitment to

⁴²⁵ Small, 112.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 113.

⁴²⁷ Federico Cantú, "A Statement," María Sodi de Ramos Martínez, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, trans. Berta de Lecuona (Los Angeles, CA: Martínez Foundation, 1949), 48.

Catholicism. John Charlot hypothesizes in his biography of his father that as a result of Charlot's decision to destroy much of his personal correspondence before marrying Zohmah, little evidence of the friendship between Cantú and Charlot remains in existence.⁴²⁸

In more recent years, exhibitions have examined the work of Ramos Martínez, particularly in Southern California and in Mexico, where the artist continues to be well known. Ramos Martínez's last major Museum exhibition in Southern California was over forty years ago.⁴²⁹ However, there have been smaller exhibitions in Southern California and large exhibitions in Mexico that have focused necessary attention on the work of Ramos Martínez. Some recent exhibitions were held at Louis Stern Fine Art (1991 and 1997), National Museum of Art, Mexico City (1992), and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Monterrey, Mexico (1996).

Although Ramos Martínez's work has not been without some criticism, as art critic Leah Ollman wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* upon viewing the show at Louis Stern, "Aside from a few painfully stiff compositions, the work abounds in elegance and concentrated beauty, not to mention irony."⁴³⁰ Surely, some of Ramos Martínez's renderings of figures are stiff, his friars and nuns from the Santa Barbara Cemetery who stand upright and exhibit angular forms. The vertical geometric forms used to represent figures in both murals and several small-scale works demonstrate the influence of Art

⁴²⁸ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work. 1.1 Sources." Charlot writes that although his mother objected to the destruction of Jean Charlot's personal correspondence that had been penned before their marriage in 1939, Jean Charlot thought that it was proper to begin their new life together without all of his personal history intact. He made sure to keep correspondence with his family and the letters he exchanged with Orozco, as he recognized their cultural significance.

⁴²⁹ *Paintings by Alfredo Ramos Martínez*, Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego (now The San Diego Museum of Art), May 12–June 16, 1968.

⁴³⁰ Leah Ollman, "Irony and Beauty from Ramos Martínez," *Los Angeles Times*, Friday, November 14, 1997. F22.

Deco, a prominent style present in the architecture of Los Angeles.⁴³¹ In his mural *Market Day*, a majority of the female figures are in motion, but it is a stoic motion as opposed to a fluid sense of movement. The stiffness of Ramos Martínez's figures is a part of his signature style. Later in her article when describing the artist's newspaper works Ollman concedes, "The grid of the classifieds becomes architectonic scaffolding for the overlying images of organic forms, while the lines of the text fade in and out behind opaque streaks of color. The effect is tailor-made for the self-conscious, Postmodern confluences of the 1990s."⁴³² Ollman recognizes Ramos Martínez's work as having resonance in a contemporary context.

Many of the communities where Ramos Martínez produced murals cherish the works he created, while others go unnoticed. While the Santa Barbara cycle remains unfamiliar to many in its community, both Scripps College and Coronado have embraced their connection to the muralist. In Coronado, *Obras de corazón: Works from the Heart of Alfredo Ramos Martínez, 1934-1944* was the inaugural exhibition in 2000 for the Museum of Art and History in Coronado, California in its new location in the former Bank of Commerce and Trust building. The exhibition included seventeen paintings and works on paper.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Anna Indych-López, "Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Indians, Hollywood, and the Los Angeles Times" *Mex/L.A.: "Mexican": Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930-1985* (Long Beach: Museum of Latin American Art, 2011), 44-47. 45.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Suzanne Muchnic, "One Legacy Revived, Another Begun," *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar, Sunday, October 1, 2000, 63-4.

K. Conclusion

The fate of numerous murals by Ramos Martínez has been negative. He created a mural in 1936 for the chapel at the Chapman Park Hotel which was later destroyed when the building was demolished; however, the mural itself had been whitewashed for a number of years.⁴³⁴ Perhaps most unfortunate was the destruction of the mural he created upon his return to Mexico City. This mural cycle exemplified the change Ramos Martínez's work had taken in the United States. Other California murals include a fresco for the First National Bank of Santa Barbara and a mural for La Quinta of Palm Springs, both have been destroyed. Although only a portion of his large-scale works exists, the artist's motivations to portray native culture of Mexico and to express his faith are evident in the works that remain.

Raised Catholic, Ramos Martínez turned more ardently to religion when his daughter was sick. He created a number of small-scale religious works, but he also completed two religious-inspired murals. Moreover, at the time of his death he was working on a large-scale project for St. John's Church in Los Angeles that consisted of designing stained glass windows. When he needed a break from the demands of the Scripps commission, in particular the heat in Claremont, California during the summer, he worked on the St. John's project for which he completed fourteen drawings, nine feet each in length, of the Stations of the Cross.⁴³⁵

Ramos Martínez lived in Los Angeles for sixteen years. In California, Ramos Martínez embraced Mexican subject matter more than before. He created murals, paintings, and drawings of the Mexican people and landscapes that celebrated the

⁴³⁴ Small, 113.

⁴³⁵ Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 41.

Mexican countryside. Increasingly he incorporated religion into his art as well. From 1929 to 1932, Ramos Martínez had successful exhibitions in San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. His work was acquired by museums and important collectors. His murals included projects for the chapel of the Santa Barbara Cemetery (1934), the La Avenida Café (1937), and Scripps College (1945), a stunning, but incomplete mural. The pageantry of the flower vendors and the bold, dramatic portraits of indigenous women are evident despite the fact that the mural was left unfinished. Ramos Martínez contributed to the presence of Mexican muralism in Southern California and infused the region with an image of Mexico that was a product of his diverse experiences. Although his construction of an identity for Mexico was not loaded with realism, it still reminded audiences of the resilience of Mexican culture and the great artistic technique of fresco painting espoused by the twentieth-century Mexican muralists as a vehicle to unite communities and communicate with the masses.



Fig. 65. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Mallorca, 1908

Pastel on paper, 24 x 34 inches

from Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 28.

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Fig. 66. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Printemps*, 1905

Pastel on cardboard, 62 x 93 inches

in *Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946): Una visión retrospectiva* (Mexico: Museo del Arte Nacional, 1992), 128.

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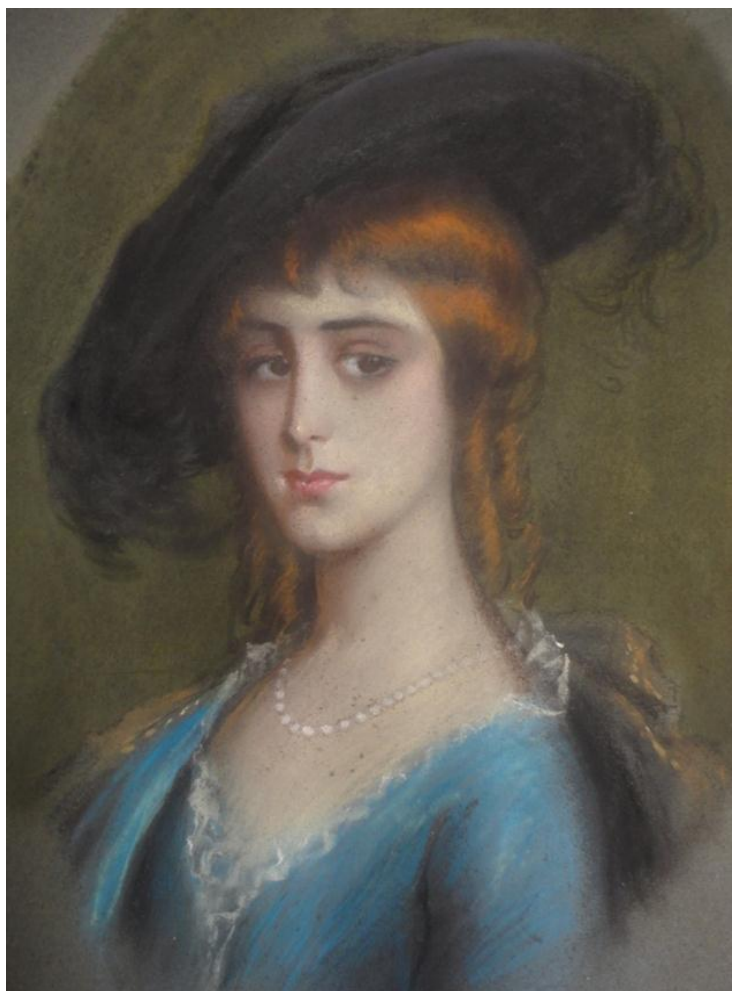


Fig. 67. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Untitled (Portrait of a Woman), 1910

Pastel on paper laid down on board, 21 x 17 inches

Private Collection, San Diego

Photograph by the author

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Fig. 68. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Untitled (Dolores Del Río), 1930

Oil and pastel on newspaper, 22 1/2 x 57 1/2 inches
Private Collection

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Fig. 69. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Untitled (Flower-Patterned Murals), 1930
Fresco, dimensions unknown
Hotel Riviera (now Centro Social, Cívico y Cultural Riviera), Ensenada, Mexico
Photograph by author
©The Alfredo Ramos Martinez Research Project,
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Fig. 70. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Untitled (Mural at Bar Andaluz), 1930
Bar Andaluz at the Hotel Riviera (now Centro Social, Cívico y Cultural Riviera),
Ensenada, Mexico
Fresco, dimensions unknown
Photograph by author
©The Alfredo Ramos Martinez Research Project, Reproduced by permission.



Fig. 71. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Untitled*, 1930
Hotel Riviera (now Centro Social, Cívico y Cultural Riviera), Ensenada,
Mexico
Fresco, dimensions unknown
Photograph by author
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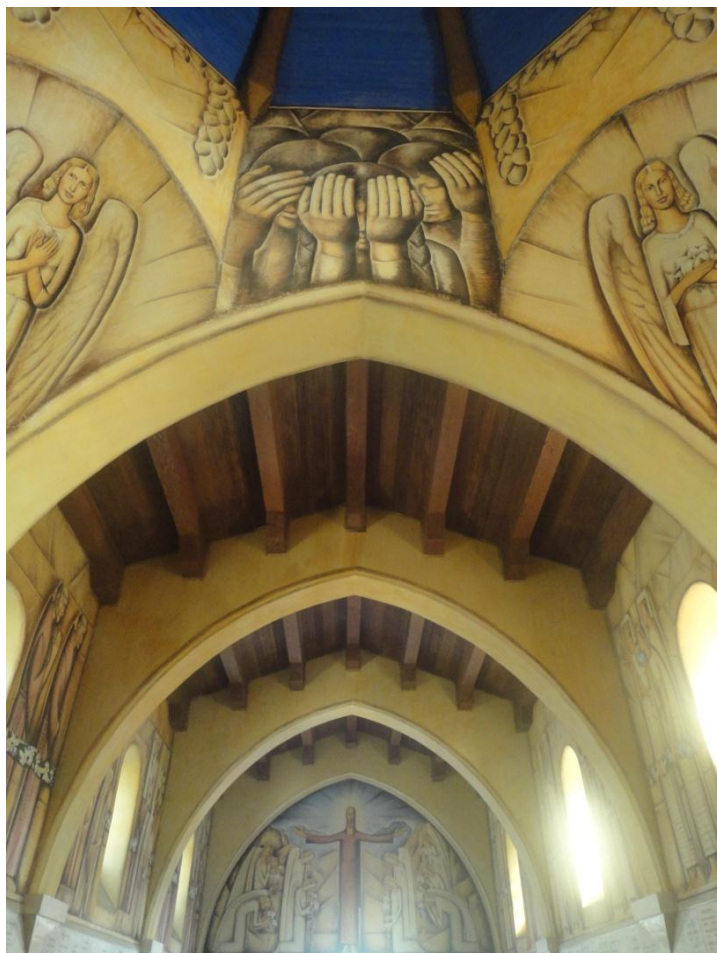


Fig. 72. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Offering to the Risen Christ, 1934

Fresco, dimensions unknown

Santa Barbara Cemetery Chapel, Santa Barbara, California

Photograph by author

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Fig. 73. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *The Guardians*, 1934
 at the home of Henry Eichheim, Santa Barbara
 Fresco, dimensions unknown
 Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 237.
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Fig. 74. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Procession of Nuns and Monks* (detail), 1934
Santa Barbara Cemetery Chapel, Santa Barbara, California
Fresco, dimensions unknown
in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 55.
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Fig. 75. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Friars and Nuns*, c. 1934

Pastel, 23 1/3 x 34 1/2 inches

The San Diego Museum of Art, Museum purchase, 1932.2

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Fig. 76. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Suffering Humanity*, 1934

Fresco, dimensions unknown

Santa Barbara Cemetery Chapel, Santa Barbara, California

Photograph by author

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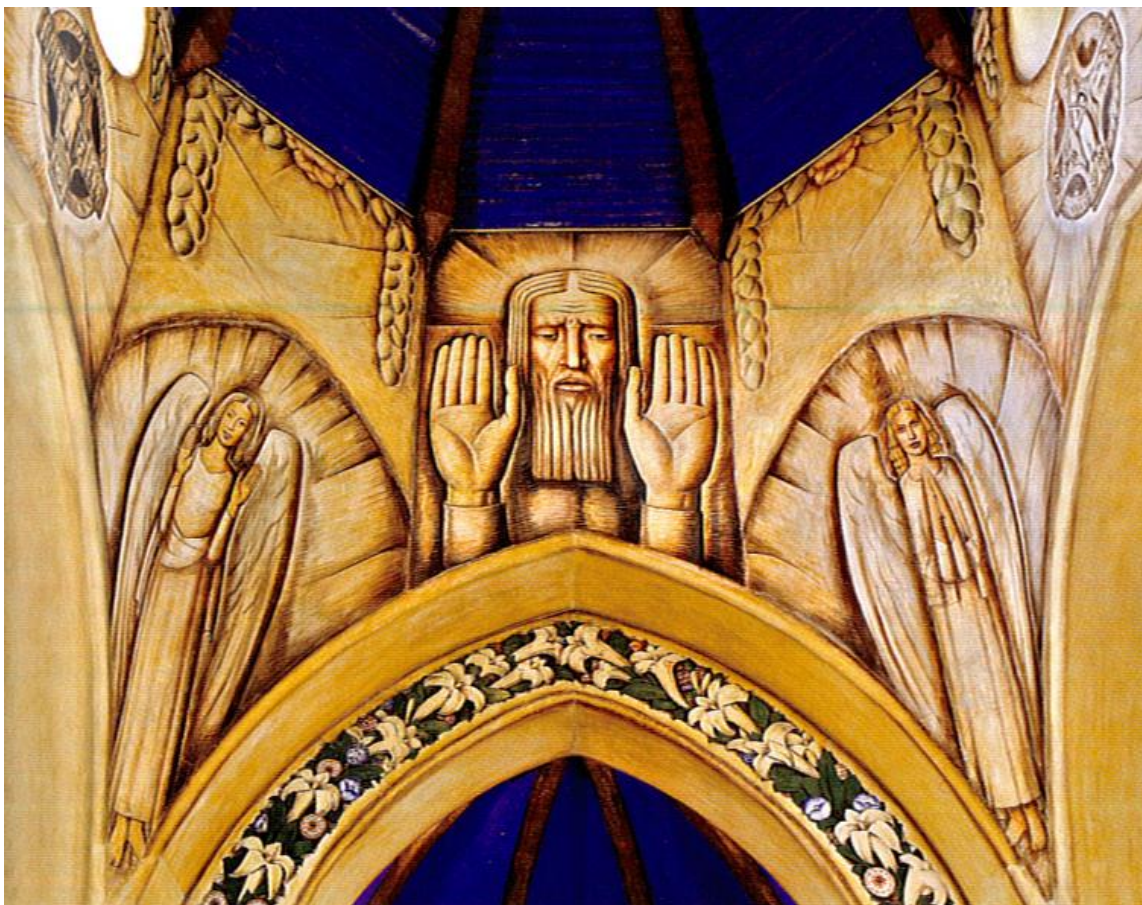


Fig. 77. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Peace be unto you*, 1934
 Fresco, dimensions unknown
 Santa Barbara Cemetery Chapel, Santa Barbara, California in
 Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie
 Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 55.
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Fig. 78. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Mary, Star of the Sea, 1937
Mary, Star of the Sea, La Jolla, California
Fresco, dimensions unknown
Photograph by author
©The Alfredo Ramos Martinez Research Project, Reproduced by
permission.



Fig. 79. Alfredo Ramos Martínez Market Day, 1938

Coronado Public Library, Coronado, California

Fresco, 7 x 48 feet

Photograph by author

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Fig. 80. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Flower Vendors, 1946
Scripps College, Claremont, California
Fresco, 103 feet long (total mural)
Photograph by author
©The Alfredo Ramos Martinez Research Project, Reproduced by permission.



Fig. 81. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Flower Vendors (detail), 1946

Scripps College, Claremont, California

Fresco, 103 feet long (total mural)

Photograph by author

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Fig. 82. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Flower Vendors (detail), 1946
Scripps College, Claremont, California
Fresco, 103 feet long (total mural)
Photograph by author
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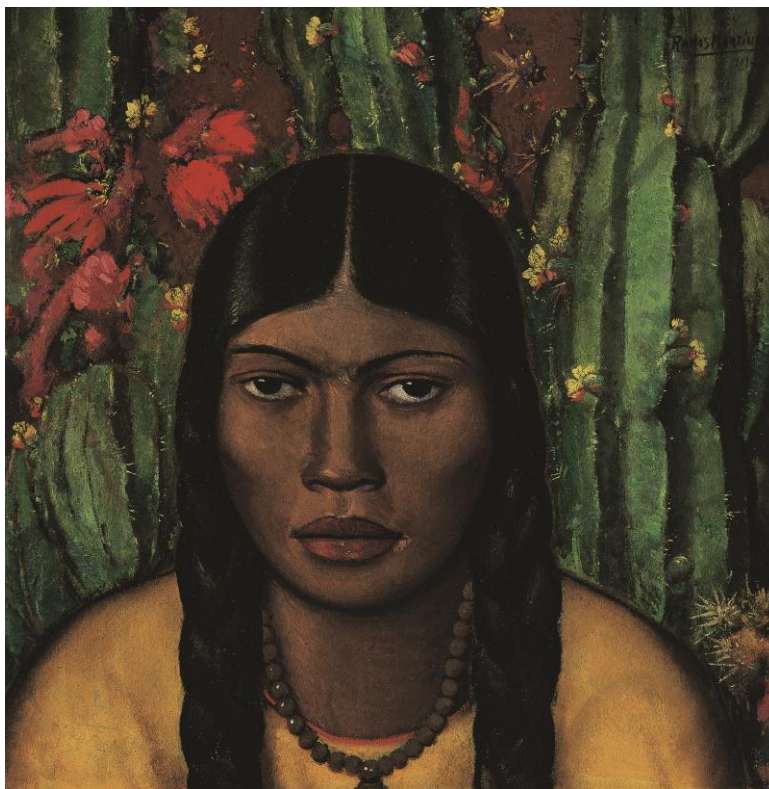


Fig. 83. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Mancacoyota, 1930
Oil on board, 15 1/10 x 15 1/10 inches
Andrés Blaisten Collection
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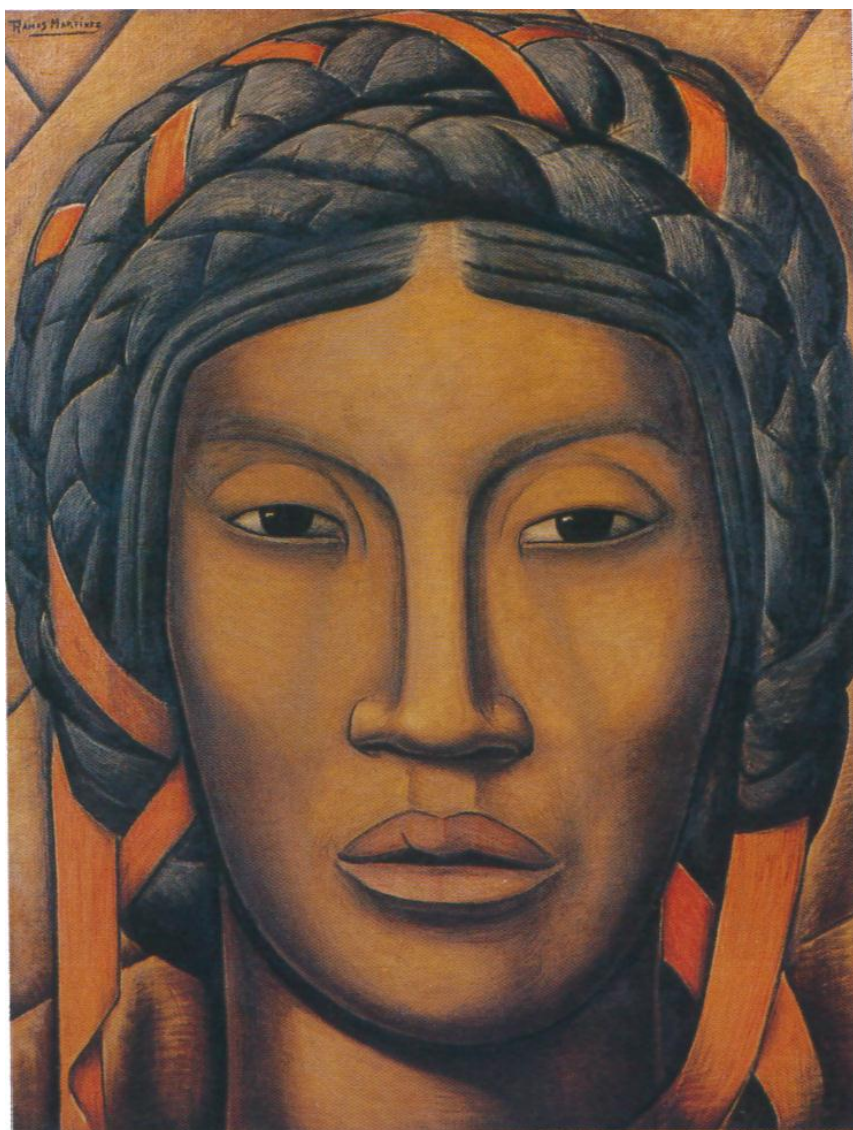


Fig. 84. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Woman from Tehuantepec*, c. 1930

Oil on canvas, 49 1/2 x 40 inches

in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 57.

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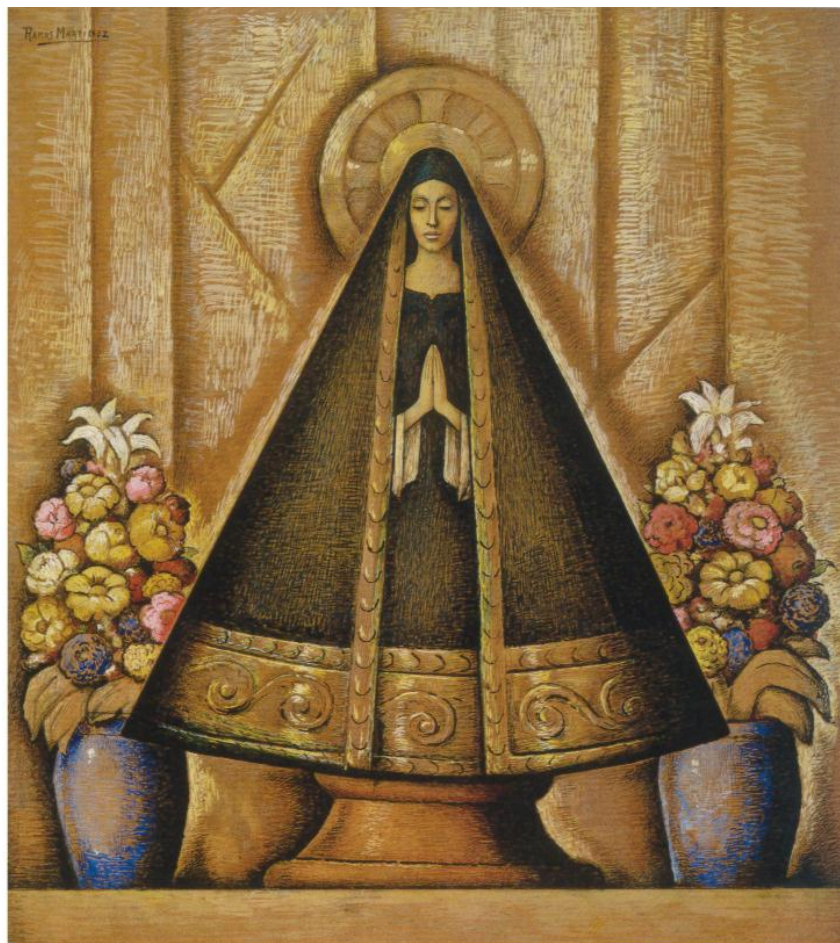


Fig. 85. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Virgin of San Juan*, c. 1940
Gouache, ink, and watercolor on newspaper, 21 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches
in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 77.
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Fig. 86. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *The Bondage of War* (detail), ca.1939

Tempera on newsprint, 22 3/4 x 17 inches

Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 169.



Fig. 87. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Christus* (detail), 1943
 Tempera on newspaper, 21 1/2 x 16 1/3 inches
 in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 182.
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Fig. 88. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1934

Fresco, 10 1/2 x 10 1/3 inches

in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 108.

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Fig. 89. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Tender Love, c. 1934

Tempera on newspaper, 20 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches
in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 117.

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Fig. 90. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1932
Oil on canvas, 32 x 28 inches
Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 93.
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Fig. 91. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Pietà*, c. 1932
Oil on canvas, 32 x 28 inches
in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez
& Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The
Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 93.
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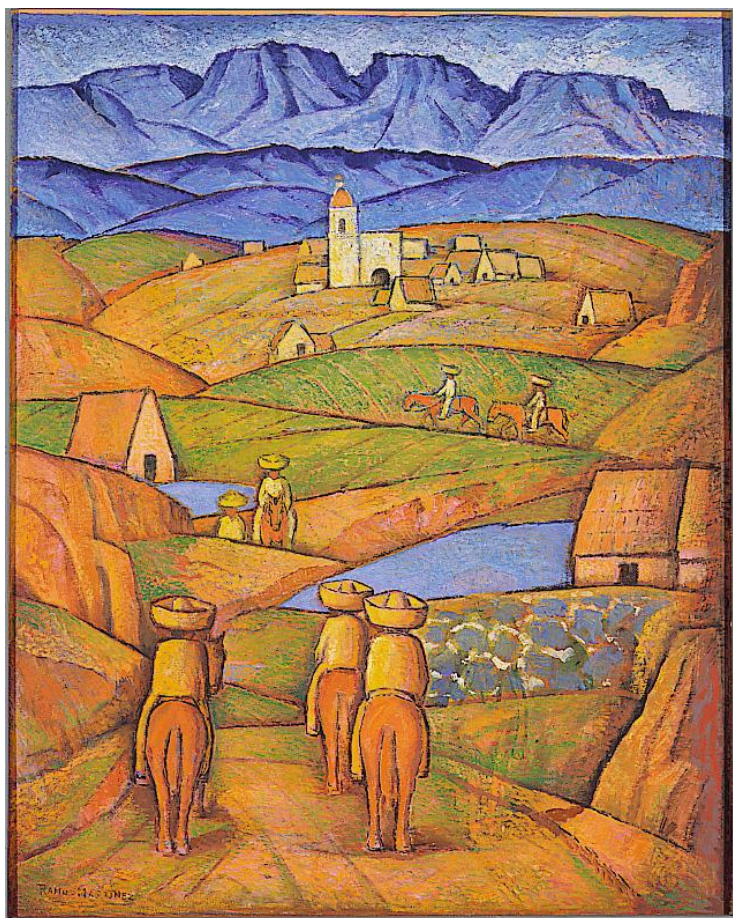


Fig. 92. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *The Charros in a Village*, c. 1941

Oil on binder board, 30 x 24 inches

The San Diego Museum of Art, Museum purchase, 1946.9

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V. CHARLOT AND RAMOS MARTÍNEZ AND A UNITED ARTISTIC VISION

While some comparisons between Charlot and Ramos Martínez were drawn in previous chapters, this chapter examines more closely than previously analyzed the correlations between the artists' works, with specific attention to how both artists shared a compatible artistic vision. After meeting one another in Mexico through the Open Air School in Coyoacán and then briefly finding themselves in Los Angeles at the same time in 1929, neither artist remained in touch. No evidence exists to support that they were ever close on a personal level, but certainly their work and the ways in which their artistic visions were formed bear a striking resemblance.⁴³⁶

The varied works created by Charlot and Ramos Martínez provide an interesting case study for understanding the impact of the Mexican mural movement in the United States. First, these artists do not fit a prescribed role in the often fixed US/Mexico dichotomy in which artists are typically viewed as either American or Mexican. Both artists traveled extensively and their work exhibits influences from different international movements in the visual arts and cannot be limited to a single national identity or even a bi-national inquiry. By frequently crossing borders, they transgressed linear and mono-nationalistic narratives. In fact, their art ultimately exists in a liminal space that is difficult to define in concrete terms and necessitates a nuanced analysis. Second, these two artists are often located frequently on the periphery of studies pertaining to the mural movement, despite being essential figures in the development of muralism during the 1920s in Mexico City. Charlot and Ramos Martínez knew the leading Mexican muralists

⁴³⁶ Margarita Nieto, *Una visión retrospectiva*, 88

and participated in the innovation of the 1920s that led to the internationally-renowned Mexican mural movement. Third, due to the fact that murals remained an important part of their work, even after the height of the mural movement, their artistic production makes for an interesting point of analysis. For example, Charlot's relationship with murals forever impacted his career and long after the international attention had moved away from murals, he retained a deep interest in the art form and created a number of murals in Hawai'i. Fourth, the presentation of the murals in more unconventional spaces is a point of interest in the story of Charlot and Ramos Martínez. Charlot and Ramos Martínez transformed spaces such as private homes, institutions like a college or university, but also cafés, banks, churches, a cemetery, and a casino with their murals. The study of individual murals in their respective locations offers the potential for probing case studies that reveal how the murals can function or in other words perform in these divergent places. Fifth, religious spaces and influences play a strong role in the careers of both artists, particularly in their later work in the United States. Local Catholic organizations and churches commissioned Charlot and Ramos Martínez and had confidence in the allegorical nature of their work and the unadorned figural work fused with abstract elements. Understanding the ways in which Charlot and Ramos Martínez pursued religious content in their art provides a more accurate understanding of the entire body of work and reveals themes and iconography quite different from the Mexican painters who during the 1920s and 1930s made muralism internationally-renowned.

A. Faith and Mexican Modernism

Traditionally the Mexican muralists are associated with atheist beliefs. Although the muralists created some anti-Catholic imagery, some were inspired by other faith

practices, for example Rivera painted indigenous traditions in his murals at the National Palace and at the Ministry of Education. Additionally, there are connections between the muralists and Catholicism. For example, Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco all have works in the collection of the Vatican.⁴³⁷ Orozco's fresco *The Franciscan and the Indian*, 1926 at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City portrays the over-eager missionary embracing an emaciated indigenous man. Metaphorically, the weight of the Church appears to crush the indigenous population. In the opening pages of his autobiography, Rivera recounts in his typically dramatic storytelling fashion, his aunts bringing him to a church for the first time.⁴³⁸ Rivera's father was an avowed anti-cleric, and it was his mother's sisters that expressed concern for the young Rivera's moral direction. So, the well-intentioned aunts took the impressionable Rivera to their local church.

Rivera later described with great glee the almost immediate uneasiness he experienced when entering the church and then he told a story of how he climbed the steps to the altar and addressed the congregation, telling them they were "stupid people" for believing in God, and that quite simply "God did not exist."⁴³⁹ In this exaggerated tale of his childhood, Rivera makes a conscious effort to not only align himself with the liberal anti-clerics in Mexico, but he also sets up a connection with one of his later murals. For his mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon at Alameda Park*, 1948, originally made for the Alameda Hotel and now housed in the Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Rivera painted the words "God does not exist." The sharp phrase appeared on a board held by

⁴³⁷ José Clemente Orozco, *El martirio de San Esteban*, 1944, oil on canvas; Diego Rivera, *Danzante guerrero*, 1950–51, watercolor; David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Mutilated Christ*, c. 1945, watercolor.

⁴³⁸ Diego Rivera and Gladys March, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960), 23–27.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*, 24–26.

the nineteenth-century philosopher Ignacio Ramírez (1818–1879), who made the statement during a lecture in 1836.⁴⁴⁰ Rivera's use of the phrase in his mural caused strong reactions. The Archbishop in Mexico City, Luís Martínez Rodríguez (1881–1956), refused to bless the hotel and vandals stormed the place with the intention of eliminating the words from the mural.⁴⁴¹

Religion for Charlot and Ramos Martínez was intertwined with their work and their personal lives. Both developed their faiths at a formative age and shared a devotion to Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, both artists were family men whose children affected their work. Ramos Martínez's wife, María Sodi de Ramos Martínez wrote, "his sorrow and that of his wife in witnessing the sufferings of their child; this caused him to turn to painting pictures of a religious nature inspired by the deep-rooted memories of his early training."⁴⁴² Charlot sent his children to Catholic schools and encouraged them to pursue spiritually-balanced lives. Perhaps most connected to his artistic production were his sons, in particular John and Martin, who assisted their father with several of his murals completed for churches. Charlot's old friend Frank Sheed hypothesized that:

Charlot's faith must have been rock built, invulnerable, or it could not have survived his work with the Mexican Muralists, who were not much given to patience with religion. I used to wonder how his faith stood up to them, how they tolerated a man so Christ centered. That it was no matter of toleration on either side I learnt from a single incident. Charlot and I emerged from lunch one day and were walking back to my office when we almost ran into Rivera, one of the greatest of those Muralists. They hailed each other in a kind of ecstasy. I slipped away, my departure unnoticed.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralist: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 175.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Sodi de Ramos Martínez, 33.

⁴⁴³ From a statement "Jean Charlot: Remembered by Frank Sheed," 5. Jean Charlot Collection

Sheed wrote that although they had personal ideological differences, Charlot and Rivera were able to maintain positive views of one another.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, despite the fact that Charlot lived his spiritual life much differently than the prevailing Mexican muralists, he exhibited a great ability to tolerate diverse points of view.

Art historian Nancy Deffebach identifies five different ways in which twentieth-century artists active in Mexico presented religious imagery.⁴⁴⁵ First, some represented religious imagery to illuminate the presence of the Catholic Church in the development of Mexican history. Second, other artists appropriated powerful Catholic imagery to communicate secular ideas. Third, some artists incorporated spiritual iconography not tied to an institution or organized religion into their works. Fourth, other artists favored representations of folk art and popular traditions with religious connotations. Finally, the fifth manner, which was the most uncommon, was the presentation of traditional religious imagery without any overt symbolism intended other than the original significance of the religious image. This last method was practiced often by both Charlot, Ramos Martínez and their peers like Chucho Reyes (1880–1977) and Federico Cantú, Mexican painters whose work existed outside of the prevailing art trends during the first half of the twentieth-century like Mexican muralism and surrealism. Like many painters active in Mexico, however, Charlot and Ramos Martínez shared an interest in narrative art, whether their depictions were religious or not. Charlot's mural *Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawai'i*, 1949 tells the story of a traditional celebration taking place outdoors where dancers and musicians figure prominently. Ramos Martínez's 1934 mural

⁴⁴⁴ Also, despite Rivera's destruction of his work at the Ministry of Education, Charlot was able to see the significance of Rivera's work.

⁴⁴⁵ Deffebach, 201–2.

for the Santa Barbara Cemetery offers an important example of Catholic narrative art in that it portrays a solemn procession before Christ. Their continued focus on religious subject matter, however, must have also appealed to their interest in storytelling. After all, despite political inspiration, Charlot's continued representation of the Way of the Cross was at a very basic level, a depiction of the gripping narrative of the most dramatic and spiritually potent event in Christianity.

Though unusual, Charlot and Ramos Martínez were not alone in their faith in Mexico; other modern artists practiced Catholic traditions as well. For example, Reyes, Luis Barragán (1902–1988), Juan Soriano (1920–2006), and Rodolfo Morales (1925–2001) all made *Viernes de Dolores* altars in their houses.⁴⁴⁶ Reyes's altar was well-known and included a colonial painting, candles, mirrored surfaces, and rose petals and took up an entire room.⁴⁴⁷ Over the course of a five-year span, from 1943 to 1948, María Izquierdo (1902–1955) painted six works that portray a home altar created for the veneration of *Viernes de Dolores*. These works were not necessarily created for strict religious devotion as art historian Nancy Deffenbach points out: "The ambiguity of the images may reflect either the problematic status of religious imagery among *avant-garde* artists in post-revolutionary Mexico or Izquierdo's own complex views about religion."⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, following Deffenbach's model, not all artists active in twentieth-century Mexico who used Catholic iconography were as certain of their faith as Charlot and Ramos Martínez.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 209.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 207.

In the early years in which they lived in the United States, Charlot and Ramos Martínez found themselves living in a complex time in the nation's history. With the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic depression of the 1930s, the country that Charlot and Ramos Martínez moved to was experiencing turmoil. Despite the tough financial times, both artists were able to find economic opportunity in the United States and to develop distinctive religiously motivated bodies of work. They were not the only artists inspired by Mexican muralism to create work in religious spaces. For example, Lucienne Bloch, who first met Rivera while working on his Rockefeller Center mural and Stephen Pope Dimitroff, who assisted Rivera with his commission for the Detroit Institute of the Arts, worked together to realize large-scale projects that on occasion were made for spiritual spaces. Two examples of projects by Bloch and Dimitroff are a fresco for the First Presbyterian Church in San Rafael, California, produced from 1973 to 1974, and a fresco and mosaic for the First Presbyterian Church in Sheridan, Wyoming, in 1979. Bloch and Dimitroff sought opportunities for their collaborations in varied spaces, but they were not motivated by their own faith when accepting religious commissions. Dimitroff was the plasterer and Bloch was the painter on their joint projects.⁴⁴⁹ These artists embraced murals for religious spaces for as a result of various reasons including a need to make a living, a declining interest in murals in public, secular spaces, and a commitment to community on both the part of the artists and the religious spaces where their works were produced. These reasons are true of the work

⁴⁴⁹ Kahlo and Rivera introduced Bloch and Dimitroff. Later they married and collaborated on murals for the rest of their lives.

of Charlot, Ramos Martínez, Bloch, and Dimitroff, but Charlot and Ramos Martínez also shared a deeply personal relationship with Catholicism that the other artists did not.⁴⁵⁰

The way in which Charlot and Ramos Martínez viewed the world was informed by their religious beliefs. “Charlot was certainly a Christian and a Catholic, but he developed his own form of being so, what he called the religion of the parishioner.”⁴⁵¹ Charlot was not interested in the religious hierarchy. He was not impressed by lofty titles or any posturing on the part of the Church’s leadership. Instead he identified with the common man, the man who prayed in the pews on Sunday. Everett Gee Jackson, an artist who spent a considerable amount of time in Mexico and possessed deep respect for both Charlot and Ramos Martínez and wrote of the latter, “Martínez took no part in the social and political controversies which raged among most of the modern artists of Mexico. He was not concerned with this or that ideology. And I believe it would be true to say that all the revolutionary artists of his time felt that his influence would prove in the end as great a force toward social and economic justice as their own. Martínez was really a St. Francis of our time.”⁴⁵² Jackson recognized that even though Ramos Martínez did not create work as overtly radical as some of his contemporaries, he was just as concerned with social and economic issues and held a steadfast concern for the plight of the people. He did not join leftist organizations, but he did join his neighborhood parish, Ramos Martínez and his

⁴⁵⁰ While Bloch and Dimitroff accepted a few religious commissions after investigating their work further, I determined that it was not of the same quality of Charlot and Ramos Martínez and therefore, not important to examine in this study. Furthermore, there were factors such as Charlot and Ramos Martínez direct involvement in the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s that made their work particularly appropriate to be linked together.

⁴⁵¹ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot: Life and Work. 1.2 Interviews.”

⁴⁵² Everett Gee Jackson, “Alfredo Ramos Martínez,” *Paintings by Alfredo Ramos Martínez*. Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego. May 12–June 16, 1968. The San Diego Museum of Art Archives.

family attended Church Blessed Sacrament in Hollywood.⁴⁵³ Each artist was motivated by their Catholic faith and the religious circumstances in both Mexico and the United States contextualize to the artist's works.

B. Religious Context

Religion has played a complex role in the development of Mexico as a modern nation. Long before the Spanish arrived in what now constitutes Mexico, belief systems and spiritual practices affected the daily lives of millions of indigenous people. Cultural groups like the Maya, the Mixtec, and the Aztec practiced polytheism and believed in the power of the natural environment to possess spiritual qualities. After the Spanish brought Catholicism to the Americas, faith and spirituality continued to permeate society. Various aspects of indigenous faith continued to be practiced during the colonial period despite the political dominance of Catholicism. Three-hundred years of colonial rule from 1521 to 1821 solidified Catholicism in Mexico and resulted in diverse forms of religious art—from the restrained sixteenth-century work influenced by Medieval and Renaissance ideas to the elaborate seventeenth-century Baroque forms, followed by the eighteenth century return to more reserved art and a growing interest in Neo-Classicism. Charlot wrote of colonial art, “Those who dismiss Colonial Hispanic art as merely an import from Spain fail to realize how tenaciously it transformed itself, and how well it governed its American growth to fit changed conditions.” Though heavily influenced by European art, colonial art in Mexico was a phenomenon of the American continent that combined

⁴⁵³ The address is 6657 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, California.

multiple cultural influences to create a hybrid art form.⁴⁵⁴ Much like the work of Charlot and Ramos Martínez, colonial art incorporated a confluence of cultural influences, possessed subliminal political messages, and had performative powers that expanded and retracted to mean different things to various audiences.

Beyond the visual arts, Catholic symbols also functioned as political statements; for example, when Padre Hidalgo (1753–1811) sounded his famous yell to inaugurate the independence movement in 1810, the people who rallied with him waved banners with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who was evoked as a nationalistic symbol.⁴⁵⁵ The melding of political and religious art took shape in Charlot and Ramos Martínez's work as well, particularly in the creation of their murals. Produced within a public space, in forms derived from their experiences in Mexico when murals functioned as political agents, the artists used walls as a way in which to express religious faith. Furthermore, as previously stated, John Charlot contends that some of his father's portrayals of violent religious art, like events depicted in the Stations of the Cross parallel the horrors of war that he was directly exposed to during World War I (1914–18) and the succession of conflicts that became a part of the collective consciousness throughout the twentieth century like the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), World War II (1939–1945), the Korean War (1950–1953), and the Vietnam War (1959–1975).

⁴⁵⁴ A number of books on colonial art have dealt with the presence of multiple cultural influences within single works of art produced during the colonial period. An abbreviated list includes: Kelly Donahue-Wallace, *Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); *Art of Colonial Latin America* (London: Phaidon, 2008); James Early, *The Colonial Architecture of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

⁴⁵⁵ D.A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Although disputes between the church in Mexico and the political establishment occurred throughout the colonial period, the nineteenth century presented new and critical dissension between the church and state within the country. This conflict affected nineteenth-century life, but it also set the stage for a major battle between church and state in the 1920s that occurred while both Charlot and Ramos Martínez were living in Mexico. Furthermore, Charlot saw the way in which Catholicism had developed historically, despite its occasional brutality, as necessary to insure the continued power of Christianity. In perhaps his harshest assessment Charlot declared that, “Perhaps, instead of hiding the past, we should rekindle a feeling of horror in the presence of heresy. In a world become Caesar’s own, today’s active horror is confined to economic communism. There are no defenders of the antiquated dream of the Inquisitor, that of preserving Christendom whole, though it is the greater aim and immeasurably purer passion.”⁴⁵⁶ This statement is one of the few by Charlot that reveals a more dogmatic point of view and contradicts more frequent statements in which he aligned himself with the people and in the case of his religious faith, with the parishioner. The historical events of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in Mexico pertaining to religious faith also laid the groundwork for Charlot and Ramos Martínez’s spiritually-motivated work.

While Catholicism had been the dominant religion throughout the colonial period, by the mid-nineteenth century other types of religious practice gained new freedoms. In 1857, Protestantism was legalized by the order of the Constitution of Mexico. Before this decree, there was Protestant activism present in the country, but the removal of the ban allowed for greater freedom and flexibility in the organization of the Protestant Church in

⁴⁵⁶ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 105.

Mexico.⁴⁵⁷ In addition to looser restrictions for Protestant missionaries, direct action was taken against the Catholic Church. During the summer of 1859, President Benito Juárez, a confirmed liberal, led the charge against the Church and instituted the Reform Laws, government guidelines that vastly reduced the powers of the Catholic Church in Mexico. He prohibited monastic orders, nationalized church property, limited the number of religious holidays and public processions, secularized church cemeteries, and declared that marriage was a civil contract.

The events of the nineteenth century inspired change that affected the development of Catholic worship in Mexico. Historian Deborah J. Baldwin writes,

The conflict between the Catholic Church and the state in the nineteenth-century Mexico created a religious as well as a political rebellion against traditional forces in that country. Distrust of a Catholic hierarchy, which chose to support the French invasion rather than Benito Juárez, encouraged the establishment of an alternative religious institution by supporters of Juárez. This religious movement was originally a national creation, later a transitory Protestant mission effort, and ultimately a national Protestant movement.⁴⁵⁸

Undoubtedly, Protestantism gained a national stage in the mid-nineteenth century, but the cynicism levied at the Catholic hierarchy was a catalyst for the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The tensions leading to the Revolution positioned liberal anti-clerics against conservative religious supporters. While Church power decreased during the administration of the liberal Benito Juárez, the number of clergy in Mexico and the overall power of the Church increased under Porfirio Díaz due to his “benign neglect.”⁴⁵⁹ While historically Juárez’s administration in Mexico, which lasted from 1858 to 1864,

⁴⁵⁷ Deborah J. Baldwin, *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution: Missionaries, Ministers, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 3.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵⁹ Matthew A. Redinger, *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 1924-1936* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 4.

has been viewed as supportive of the people and the common good, years later, Díaz's dictatorship was associated with neglect of the people and improvement in the lives of those who were already wealthy. To counteract the dictator, Díaz's wife was a devout Catholic and often served as an intermediary between her husband and the Church hierarchy.⁴⁶⁰

One of the great concerns during Díaz's administration and a catalyst for the Revolution was land ownership. This issue directly involved the Catholic Church as the institution owned vast amounts of property throughout the country. The amount of land owned by the Church would become one of the most cited charges against the Church in the liberal movement in opposition to the Catholic institution in the years following the Mexican Revolution.

Although the poor suffered in many ways under the Porfiriato, the Church attempted to make a renewed commitment to society's most struggling members during this time period, in part as a companion to solidify support among the people. Despite this attempt, the Church strengthened its bonds with its most ardent supporters who were conservative and wealthy.⁴⁶¹ This enhanced relationship between the landowning class and the Church led to further strain between the liberal sectors of the population such as unions and progressive politicians and Catholic leaders.⁴⁶² Without a doubt, they needed backing as Luis A. Marentes explains, "Catholicism, for Mexican liberals and radicals, is an anathema; it is the cultural instrument of conservative oppressors, an instrument of Spanish conquerors, Maximilian, Díaz, the *cristeros*, and, by the 1930s, Franco in

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 13.

⁴⁶² Ibid, 14.

Spain.”⁴⁶³ The *cristeros*, whose battlecry was “Viva Cristo Rey!,” were united in their opposition to President Calles and their dedication to the Catholic Church. From 1926 to 1929, the *cristeros* participated in a series of armed rebellions against government forces.

For his part, Calles saw the Catholic Church as constantly interfering with government matters. In a brief statement published in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1926, President Calles stated that Mexico faced continuing issues related to land, oil, education, foreign involvement, and religion. He explained that in terms of religious issues the problems lied with “the constitutional laws of Mexico that these chiefs pretend to ignore.”⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, for Calles, one of his main concerns with the Catholic Church in Mexico was regarding the amount of wealth that the institution had accumulated since its founding in the sixteenth century. Calles stated that less than one-third of the wealth of Mexico was owned by Mexicans and that sixty-percent of the Mexican-owned wealth was in the hands of the Church. He claimed that “one can understand why we always have rebellions on the part of the Catholic clergy who fear at every moment of the struggle to lose their main strength: the millions that they have accumulated against the definite and express provisions of the Fundamental Charter of our country.”⁴⁶⁵ Though Calles was frustrated with the Catholic Church, he developed a plan to defend his ideas to his critics. Calles was certainly aware that he had to be careful in his opposition to the Mexican Church. Many of his supporters were loyal Catholics so he managed to pepper his language of opposition to the leaders of the Catholic Church in Mexico with statements of support for religious faith. He offered, “In conclusion I wish to lay stress

⁴⁶³ Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000), 54.

⁴⁶⁴ Plutarco Elías Calles, “The Policies of Mexico Today,” *Foreign Affairs* 5, no.1 (October 1926):1-2.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

upon the fact that a real religious problem does not exist in Mexico. I mean that there is no such thing as persecution of a religious character against religious creeds or opposition on the part of the Government to the dogmas or practices of any religion.”⁴⁶⁶ Of course, to loyal Catholics this statement was far from true.

From 1926 to 1929, the Bishops of Mexico closed all of the churches in reaction to President Calles’s administration and their anticlerical stance.⁴⁶⁷ Charlot expressed concern for the criticism of Catholicism in Mexico. “By the 1920s it was the Catholic who had become the hunted and the killed. The persecution of the Church that I witnessed in Mexico makes gory reading, and made not a few true martyrs.”⁴⁶⁸ Furthermore, American Catholics expressed great frustration over the situation in Mexico. Many were outraged that the liberal revolution in Mexico had led to a persecution of Catholics and due to this oppression, the leaders of the Mexican Church had closed their doors, and as a result the people lost the ability to attend regular mass. The President of the United States at the time, Calvin Coolidge (1872–1933), who was in office from 1923 to 1929, received complaints from members of the Knights of Columbus (the largest lay Catholic organization), the National Councils of Catholic Men and Women, and from other influential Catholic leaders who appealed for US diplomatic intervention.⁴⁶⁹ Calles and his supporters walked the line between restricting the Church and avoiding any additional uprisings among the people. After Charlot and Ramos Martínez had left for the United States, the oppression of Catholics in Mexico ended

⁴⁶⁶ Calles, 4.

⁴⁶⁷ Robert E. Quick, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 105.

⁴⁶⁹ Redinger, 9.

officially with the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas from 1934 to 1940 when he repealed ant-clerical laws and removed cabinet members who had expressed their loyalty to Calles.⁴⁷⁰ Cárdenas (1895–1970) set a new tone for church and state relationships in the twentieth century, but the wounds of the past would remain.

The practice of religious worship and the stability of religious authority in the United States did not experience the same challenges in the opening decades of the twentieth century as Mexico; this was mainly as a result of the fact that religion and government were not as intrinsically intertwined as they had been in Mexican history. There were considerable changes, however, in the way in which American Catholicism functioned during the first half of the twentieth century. After World War I, public opinion of Catholics in the United States improved dramatically as many American Catholics had served in the armed forces.⁴⁷¹ Despite these advances, American Catholics remained a divided group and there were many sub-groups and philosophical and political disagreements and some ethnic groups tended to worship independently from the larger Catholic population.

The Catholic Church in the United States during the 1930s engaged with social activism due to the popularity of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement and its founding of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper. Day, along with her co-founder Peter Maurin, asserted that the newspaper was a way in which to communicate the social justice concerns of the Catholic Church to as many people as possible.⁴⁷² In January of 1936, Day offered this description of her work, "We have tried, all of us, to be workers

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁷² Maurin was a French philosopher who moved to the United States in 1909.

and scholars, and to combine work and prayer according to the Benedictine ideal. We have tried to imitate St. Francis in his holy poverty. Our aim has been to combat the bourgeois spirit by the Franciscan spirit; to oppose to class-war technique the performance of the works of mercy.”⁴⁷³ Though Day found herself in opposition to left-leaning liberals with atheist views, she shared with many different people a commitment to the plight of the people. She counted among her friends, the Communist activist and photographer Tina Modotti, who was an associate of Charlot’s in Mexico.⁴⁷⁴

Beyond the connection of Catholicism and social justice, Charlot shared in common with Maurin a particular world view that came through in his art. Maurin criticized industrial labor, viewing the monotony and harsh conditions of factory work and its division of labor as contradictory to the “natural rhythms” of agricultural labor.⁴⁷⁵ He held in high regard the work of the farmer who worked closely with the earth and witnessed the entire full cycle of the fruits of his labor. Charlot rarely chose to depict the urban worker and preferred instead the rural worker as evidenced by his mural *Cotton Gin* in Athens, Georgia which champions the plantation worker or the easel painting *Mexican Kitchen*, which presents one of the most common images in the artist’s *oeuvre*, a depiction of a woman grinding corn on a *metate*. In the domestic scene, Charlot focuses on the simple tasks of daily life. His repeated depiction of these types of kitchen scenes relates further to Maurin’s reverence for the ways of life stripped of industrial advances and for the people who faced economic hardships.

⁴⁷³ *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005 (1983), 71.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 299.

⁴⁷⁵ Mary C. Segers, “Equality and Christian Anarchism: The Political and Social Ideas of the Catholic Worker Movement,” *The Review of Politics* 40, no.2 (April 1978): 213.

Generally speaking, overtly religious art has not been a considerable component of the visual arts in the United States. Joshua C. Taylor contends that,

To suppose that this lack of obvious religiosity in art is simply the result of a largely protestant culture, is too easy an answer. Although the nature of the church in America in its diversified forms allowed for little direct patronage of art, there was nothing in protestant thought that would militate against art as such; most movements, whether philosophical or evangelical in spirit, insisted that a religious principle would underlie all human activity, and given the fact that art did exist, one might suppose that it was granted no exception.⁴⁷⁶

Following Taylor, the role of Protestantism in American cultural history did not hinder artistic production, but certainly the numbers of notable artists producing Christian art during the early twentieth century were few in number. Much like in Mexico, Christian art was not considered to be a part of the mainstream art trends in the twentieth century.

There are a few important examples of noted American painters who dealt with religious subject matter. American artist John LaFarge (1835–1910) created a number of religiously-motivated murals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including his first mural which was realized for the Trinity Church in Boston in 1873. Another LaFarge mural, *American Madonna*, 1904 for the Emmanuel Chapel of St. Luke's Cathedral in Portland, Maine was inspired by Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*. During his career he produced not only murals, but he also completed stained glass windows for churches in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. John Singer Sargent (1858–1925) produced the largest religious mural cycle, *The Development of Religious Thought from Paganism to Christianity in the United States*, 1919, though ironically the murals were not made for a church space, but at the Boston Public Library. Sargent's mural consisted

⁴⁷⁶ Joshua C. Taylor, "The Religious Impulse," *The Hand and the Spirit: Religious Art in America, 1700–1900*, ed. Jane Dillenberger and Joshua C. Taylor (Berkeley, CA: University Art Museum, Berkeley, 1973), 10.

of oil on canvas panels that were painted in England and then shipped to the United States. The noted French liturgical muralist, Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), painted decorations along the staircase, but after much debate regarding whether or not artists who created work for the project should be American, American painters, specifically Sargent and Edwin A. Abbey (1852–1911), were chosen to create the larger mural cycles.⁴⁷⁷ Sargent added plaster reliefs to the canvas composition making the mural a three-dimensional work.

While LaFarge and Sargent produced work for audiences in New England, across the United States in California, Christianity was represented in a different context. References to the colonial heritage of California were made in many public art projects of the 1930s in the state, although the subject matter tended to be romanticized.⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, direct reference to Catholicism was typically made in the depiction of the Franciscans, who built a majority of the missions in the area, conducting outreach to the local indigenous population.⁴⁷⁹ This approach differed greatly from works by Charlot and Ramos Martínez in the sense that many New Deal artists saw the Franciscan missionaries as the starting point in delineating the history of Mexican art. Instead of focusing on labor for example, certain murals tended to emphasize an environment of luxurious behavior

⁴⁷⁷ *The Hand and the Spirit: Religious Art in America, 1700–1900*, ed. Jane Dillenberger and Joshua C. Taylor (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1972), 178.

⁴⁷⁸ Three California murals with references to the colonial past of California are *Incidents in California History*, 1937 by Suzanne Scheuer at the Berkeley Post Office; *Early California*, 1936 by James Redmond at the Compton Post Office; and *History of San Juan Bautista Mission*, 1936 by Vladimir Nemkoff at the Hollister Post Office.

⁴⁷⁹ Steven M. Gelber, “Working to Prosperity: California’s New Deal Murals,” *California History* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1979):114.

on the part of Catholic Californians who appear as beautiful men and women enjoying parties, music, and bullfights.⁴⁸⁰

Charlot and Ramos Martínez make up an important part of the story of modern religious art in the United States. In describing Charlot's artistic process in developing liturgical art, Frank Sheed wrote, "When he was reading Scripture, he saw it as he saw a scene he was painting, saw it in itself, saw it in its context. But his mind was doing its own kind of seeing too."⁴⁸¹ Here, Sheed identifies the process of reading and the method of constructing images as one in the same for Charlot. The practice of religion and the making of art were innately connected for Charlot as was making liturgical art of significance. Charlot could be harsh when describing liturgical art that he found to be objectionable. He wrote, "We pray before plastercast Saints as soft-textured as margarine and colored as sickeningly as that mammoth ice-cream sundae once known as "moron's delight."⁴⁸² The artist was not shy in his estimation of bad liturgical art, though his son John Charlot put his reasoning behind these strong sentiments more eloquently when he wrote, "All his life, Charlot would fight for some recognition of the importance of good art for Christianity as opposed to the more patronized bad art that he found diabolical in the strict sense of the term: it distanced people from God."⁴⁸³ Religious art produced without concern for quality prevented people from practicing their faith.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 115.

⁴⁸¹ "Jean Charlot: Remembered by Frank Sheed," 7. Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

⁴⁸² Jean Charlot, "Catholic Art in America: Debts and Credits," *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*. Volume I. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1972), 259.

⁴⁸³ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.7 Christianity."

C. Shared Subjects

The Mexican muralist Orozco asserted, “Be wary of painting that needs explanations in order to be ‘understood.’ What you think if, while you were enjoying some good music, an erudite musicologist started to give an ‘explanatory’ lecture?”⁴⁸⁴ Though Orozco did not always appreciate the value in Ramos Martínez’s work and late in his life lost touch with his good friend Charlot, all three artists agreed with this statement as they favored a straightforward approach to art-making in which their work could be easily “read” by many people. For Charlot, this approach came to him early and as a part of his first formal foray into liturgical art. “La Gilde Notre-Dame, the liturgical art society that Charlot joined later, was imbued with the medieval ideal of the anonymous artist communicating an important message clearly to the public.”⁴⁸⁵ In the United States, Charlot and Ramos Martínez developed work that that was dominated by figural forms and reinforced human experience through narratives that told stories of daily life, struggle, and redemption. These strategies were identical to those promoted by Mexican muralism, though perhaps different on a surface level; they were quite similar in concept to the works of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros. Daily life is celebrated in the work of Diego Rivera at the Ministry of Education murals, for example in the fresco, *Our Bread*, 1928 on the south wall in the Courtyard of the Fiestas and also by Ramos Martínez in his mural for Scripps College. In Rivera’s fresco *Our Bread*, a worker’s family sits around the table for dinner while in the background an indigenous woman signifies the rural experience and represents the act of labor by carrying fruit to offer the family on top of her head. Siqueiros’s mural, *New Democracy*, 1945-46 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in

⁴⁸⁴ Jean Charlot, *Three Unpublished Writings*, 92.

⁴⁸⁵ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.2 Sensitivity and Views.”

Mexico City a central female figure extends her arms broadly and looks upwards in both agony and defiance. Ramos Martínez's mural for the Santa Barbara Cemetery addresses the struggle of the people. Orozco's *Prometheus*, 1930 at Pomona College heroically brings fire to the people. Charlot's *Our Lady of Sorrows* in Farmington, Michigan deals with redemption. Moreover, a fusion exists between art that portrays religious subject matter and art that represents daily struggle. Religious art can be a part of daily life and everyday challenges are evident in certain religious narratives.

When portraying the native populations of Mexico, both Charlot and Ramos Martínez created work that could be viewed as romantic because for the most part they tended to focus on moments of daily life without focusing on instances of struggle. Typically, themes of struggle and redemption were reserved for their religious-inspired works. As outsiders with "foreign eyes," their art practice can be criticized for creating work within a colonial framework. These artists traveled extensively, left Mexico, returned to Mexico, and continued to be influenced by Mexican culture despite no longer living in the country. As art historian James Oles writes, "The abstraction of the Mexican, his transformation into a timeless symbol of a timeless world, has a long history."⁴⁸⁶ The approach to portraying the indigenous communities of Mexico as timeless reoccurs in many American and Mexican modernists in the first half of the twentieth century and as Oles hints, this type of visual strategy has a long history, dating back to sixteenth-century representations of native populations by Europeans proved to be inaccurate. Charlot and Ramos Martínez were drawn to the representation of indigenous communities and traditions unaffected by modernity or even slight changes. Change, of course, is a process

⁴⁸⁶ Oles, *South of the Border*, 79.

that occurs in all communities, although it can be measured variedly among diverse societies.

Charlot and Ramos Martínez began their fascination with life different from their own in a focused way when, as young men, they traveled to the Brittany region of France for inspiration. Breton peasants captured the imagination of many artists working in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though Brittany had already begun to modernize and the life of the peasantry was not as quaint or simplistic as it was frequently represented. In her essay on the French painter Gauguin, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau writes,

But from the perspective of an inquiry into the terms of a nascent primitivism, what needs to be emphasized is the construction of Brittany as a discursive object; in keeping with analogous constructions such as Orientalism, we might call this construction “Bretonism.” Accordingly, the distance between the historical actuality of Brittany in the later 1880s and the synthesis representation of it is not reducible to a distance from or a distortion of historical truth, but must be examined as a discursive postulate in its own right.⁴⁸⁷

Charlot and Ramos Martínez continued with their interest in village life in Mexico. Following Solomon-Godeau’s hypothesis as expressed above, Charlot and Ramos Martínez’s approach was more of a discursive postulate than mere distortion of indigenous reality or as a result of their status as outsiders. In effect, their common vision of indigenous culture had roots in the nineteenth-century conception of “other” and proceeded to grow in Mexico and later in the United States. This concept was a part of social, cultural, economic, and political factors that developed over time as opposed to individual artists developing a distorted version of history and/or reality. Removed from

⁴⁸⁷ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism,” *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 316.

Mexico and created in the United States, however, these representations can take on new meaning, particularly in the case of Ramos Martínez. Historian John Hart writes,

During the 1920s a group of American bohemians, intellectuals, and leftists took up residence in Mexico City, and with their art and their writings they began to alter the image of the Mexican Revolution in the United States. By the end of the decade they had challenged the earlier and enduring vision of Mexico—one formulated by Richard Harding Davis, Jack London, and the Hollywood cinema—as a chaotic ‘half-breed’ nation in need of Anglo-Saxon direction. Mexico became a nation of indigenous people and those with mixed blood who had risen up in search of regeneration and justice.⁴⁸⁸

Though Charlot and Ramos Martínez were not Americans by birth, they participated in a new type of representation of Mexican culture in the United States by artists and others who had direct experience with Mexico. Before this talented group of artists emerged in the 1920s that countered the previous decade’s representations of Mexico, Hollywood created visual images, including the early films of Dolores del Río in which audiences were granted “spectorial desire” of the Mexicans they imagined.⁴⁸⁹ Following these ideas, Charlot and Ramos Martínez belonged to a group of artists who portrayed indigenous cultures of Mexico in an effort to highlight their distinctive customs, but also as a manner of honoring their quests for justice. The native populations of Mexico and the remnants of their cultural past have resisted assimilation and colonial control in its many forms from the Spanish to outside foreign interests for 500 years.

D. Quest for Social Justice and Religious Implications

The trajectory of Charlot’s career after arriving in the United States reveals a more diverse body of work than that produced by Ramos Martínez in California. Charlot

⁴⁸⁸ John Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 367.

⁴⁸⁹ Hersfield, 103.

always returned to Mexican culture for artistic inspiration, but he also portrayed local life in Georgia and Colorado Springs. He became a student of ancient Hawaiian culture and portrayed it frequently and as extensively discussed already in a previous chapter, he embraced liturgical art. Ramos Martínez was a multidimensional artist, but after moving to California he tended to oscillate between representations related to Mexican identity and religious art.⁴⁹⁰ His choice to pursue art that was typically nonconfrontational fit in well with many other mural projects in California that were created during the same period in which Ramos Martínez produced work in the state.

Over 200 artists developed murals as a result of the W.P.A in California, and few of these artists embraced Marxism and overt political activity, instead embracing the power of labor as a tool with which to solve the country's economic problems.⁴⁹¹ The WPA and other outreach programs inspired a fair amount of support toward the government. "Perhaps what was most remarkable about the 1930s was the optimism. Despite the real suffering that Americans endured because of the Great Depression, the belief grew that an energetic and expanding government could work for the individual to alleviate misery, restore political faith, and improve the very structure of society."⁴⁹² Labor became a central theme in many New Deal works as hope existed that hard work would incite change.

The largest and best-regarded public mural projects in California were painted in San Francisco during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1933, San Francisco-based artists Bernard

⁴⁹⁰ Still-lives were a part of his work as well, but those works are not as relevant to this study as the works portraying Mexico or liturgical art.

⁴⁹¹ Steven M. Gelber, "Working to Prosperity: California's New Deal Murals," *California History* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1979) : 99.

⁴⁹² Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markovitz, "New Deal for Public Art," *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, ed. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 128.

Baruch Zakheim (1896–1985) and Ralph Stackpole (1885–1973) became the leaders of the mural project at Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. Along with works by Zakheim and Stackpole, twenty-four artists realized murals at the site in 1934. A majority of the artists used the fresco technique in ode to Rivera who painted four murals in the San Francisco area.⁴⁹³ Many of the artists chose labor, either agricultural or industrial, for the main topic of the murals. After the artists were finished in the summer of 1934, a great controversy arose regarding the murals and the building was locked by police officials for a time to combat criticism about the leftist nature of the subject matter in some of the murals, particularly those by Zakheim and Victor Arnautoff. Zakheim's *The Library*, 1934 depicts a man who reaches for a copy of *The Capital* by Karl Marx. In Arnautoff's mural, *City Life*, *The New Masses* and *The Daily Worker* are sold at a newsstand. These small references, and a few others, were enough to cause great concern and public scandal. After a compromise was reached in which one artist by the name of Clifford Wright agreed to alter his mural, in October of 1934 Coit Tower re-opened.⁴⁹⁴

Another important San Francisco mural cycle was completed by the Russian-born painter Anton Refregier from 1941–48 for a post office located in the city's downtown.⁴⁹⁵ This mural cycle included both typical and surprising imagery for a public project in California. Across the twenty-seven panels painted by Refregier he depicted Spanish colonists, the founding of the state of California, and pioneers moving west to improve their economic circumstances. These historical representations were fairly common and

⁴⁹³ Orville O. Clarke, Jr., "Social Statements in Art: W.P.A. Murals," *Antiques and Fine Art* (November-December 1987):57.

⁴⁹⁴ Clarke, 59.

⁴⁹⁵ Today the building is known as the Rincon Annex. The location is 180 Steuart Street, San Francisco, California.

not considered to be offensive. Refregier however also included more controversial subject matter in his presentation of the waterfront strike of 1934 and the violent abuse of Chinese Americans by policemen. This imagery caused uproar from government officials and conservative community members, but although there were protests, the murals remained intact.

While Ramos Martínez did not represent physical labor as frequently as the New Deal muralists in California, he shared with many of them a tendency toward less overtly political works of art. There are exceptions, of course. On occasion Ramos Martínez depicted Mexican revolutionaries in small-scale works; for example, his painting *Zapatistas*, c. 1932 portrays a group of armed revolutionaries huddled together. Ramos Martínez's more political work in the early 1930s corresponds with Siqueiros's time in Los Angeles and suggests that the artist was influenced by the presence of the radical Mexican muralist in the same city.⁴⁹⁶

The works on newspaper created by Ramos Martínez in California took on new meaning as the artist's typical representation of the indigenous population of Mexico positioned in proximity to advertisements for American products and headlines with the latest events took on new meaning. For example, a representation of two fruit vendors on the front of the financial section of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, dated Sunday July 12, 1936, provides a startling contradiction (fig. 93). While the two women hold the fruit that they will sell at the marketplace, they stand in relation to typeface that reports on the recent economic news as exemplified by the headline that reads, "Wheat Prices Drop

⁴⁹⁶ Anna Indych-López, "Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Indians, Hollywood, and the Los Angeles Times" *Mex/L.A.: "Mexican": Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930-1985* (Long Beach: Museum of Latin American Art, 2011), 44-47. 47.

Five Cents.” Furthermore, Ramos Martínez usurps a powerful space, the financial section that would most typically be used by American businessmen, and supplants a representation of two indigenous women. Often in his newspaper works created in California, the artist chose the classified section to use as a surface for his work. The typically rectangular entries offered the artist geometric pattern that appealed to his sensibility, particularly when he often added bold, angular lines to accentuate the background of his compositions. This choice also reveals further socio-economic relationships as the classifieds of the *Los Angeles Times*, Ramos Martínez’s newspaper of choice, were a space made for the consumer. By drawing his favored compositions on this particular section, Ramos Martínez re-contextualizes a commercial space. Ramos Martínez’s depictions of indigenous culture on papers from the most well-known newspapers in California cannot be taken lightly. With his *Defender*, c. 1932, realized on the classifieds section of the June 5, 1932 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, Ramos Martínez drew a portrait of a Mexican man with his fist raised in front of his chin (fig. 94). In the background, the type of the newspaper offers beauty suggestions and information about upcoming auctions. The diagonal lines behind the man could be read as a maguey plant, a visual device often used by the artist to evoke Mexican geography and to suggest the traditions of Mexico. Ramos Martínez was not a particularly political person, but he was aware of social conditions.⁴⁹⁷ The history of Mexicans in California from colonial times to the present has been fraught with complication and Ramos Martínez must have been aware of the symbolism involved in the creation of his works

⁴⁹⁷ Dr. Margarita Nieto (Professor of Chicano/a Studies and Art History, Cal State Northridge), in discussion with the author, January 2012. There is no evidence that Ramos Martínez identified with any political organizations in Los Angeles.

on newspapers. The Mexican workers employed in the fields north and south of Los Angeles during the 1930s earned modest incomes. The average salary was twelve dollars a week and most families survived on \$491.12 each year.⁴⁹⁸

Ramos Martínez most often drew on the *Los Angeles Times*, which was certainly his closest newspaper, but it is also interesting to think about how he chose to create works of laborers on top of the typeface of a historically conservative news agency. As Ramos Martínez arrived in the United States with his family in 1929 and the economic climate for the country looked bleak, repatriation⁴⁹⁹ in California became a popular policy in Los Angeles actively supported by the publishers of the *Los Angeles Times*.⁵⁰⁰ Including the Mexican immigrants who were officially sent back by the US government and those who chose to leave on their own, 35,000 or in other terms, one-third of the Mexican population of Los Angeles returned to Mexico as a result of repatriation.⁵⁰¹ The power of the *Los Angeles Times* was not only conservative, but also extremely influential. Harry Chandler was the force behind the *Los Angeles Times* during Ramos Martínez's time in L.A. as he led the paper from 1917 to 1944. He was very active in Los Angeles and participated in a number of building projects. He was also involved in bringing the Summer Olympics to Los Angeles in 1932 and supported the reconstruction of Olvera Street.

One question that comes to mind where the continued representation of both Mexico and specifically images of the indigenous population are concerned remains

⁴⁹⁸ Monroy, 252.

⁴⁹⁹ As a result of economic depression, many Anglo Americans looked at immigrant populations with suspicion.

⁵⁰⁰ Monroy, 147.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 150.

whether Charlot and Ramos Martínez's financial benefit from this type of work was a major motivation in their continued use of the subject matter. A better case can be made for economic concerns where the work of Ramos Martínez is concerned. After Ramos Martínez returned to Mexico from his tenure in France, he expressed great interest in Mexican culture, but he continued to paint portraits of upper class women. After arriving in the United States, the artist's portraits of wealthy subjects decreased. In the United States in the 1930s, there was a demand for quaint, romantic, and even ethnographic portrayals of the Mexican people. Furthermore, the type of representation favored by Ramos Martínez paralleled the way in which Mexican identity was perceived in Hollywood.⁵⁰² While Ramos Martínez was a talented and creative artist, his resolve to create work that was economically viable may have inspired the subject matter of many of his works as well.

Both artists pursued social justice in their art, though the realization of this motivation occurred in different ways. Politics and religion were connected for both artists, but the relationship appears more clearly in Charlot's work, whereas Ramos Martínez's political efforts are more secular in appearance. Charlot did not follow a strict guidebook to the Catholic faith. His friend Frank Sheed explained, "We both saw that to abandon the Church because one felt that Pope or Curia or our parish priest had acted badly was to attach too much importance to parish priest or Curia or Pope. Christ is the point: if he can put up with them, we can."⁵⁰³ Again, Charlot refused to be occupied by

⁵⁰² For more information on this topic see Clara F. Rodriguez, *Heroes, Lovers, and Others: The Story of Latinos in Hollywood* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004) and Joanne Hersfield, *Inventing Dolores del Río* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁵⁰³ "Jean Charlot: Remembered by Frank Sheed," 4. Jean Charlot Collection. Hamilton Library. Honolulu, Hawai'i.

church politics whether they were happening in Rome or at his local church, instead he focused on his own relationship with God.⁵⁰⁴ The ability to communicate directly with God became one of the hallmarks of later radical catholic movements such as liberation theology, which swept Latin America during the 1980s. Charlot's faith and his expression of liturgical art were not immune to current events. He developed liturgical art as a response to events that he could not explain. For example, "Charlot's Old Testament subjects tend to be fearsome—the Fall, the Flood, the Sacrifice of Isaac—and he used them to articulate his tragic feelings about life, especially World War I."⁵⁰⁵ The dramatic events described in the Bible from environmental disaster to tragic death affected Charlot and he was able to see relationships with these religious narratives and the current events he witnessed. In a sense, his creation of religious art work allowed him to process World War I during which he saw first-hand the ravages of war.

Charlot's interest in communities and cultures that were traditionally neglected by mainstream society could be understood in terms of his religious faith. He wrote, "Perhaps I have stressed the role of the eye unduly. There is still a deeper contact with the Church wherein all geographical and racial dissimilarities become reconciled. A common denominator or nucleus that binds together laymen and clerics all around the earth."⁵⁰⁶ Charlot aspired to have people from all different cultural backgrounds and economic experiences be involved with art, and specifically to engage with his work. Art Historian Carolyn Klarr commented on this subject, "His work in the United States continued to

⁵⁰⁴ This point of view parallels a common Protestant sensibility and reflects a way of thinking that would later be championed by liberal Catholics in Latin American in the second half of the twentieth century as a part of liberation theology.

⁵⁰⁵ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 2.3 The Maternal Side."

⁵⁰⁶ Jean Charlot, *Born Catholics*, 112.

express a particular interpretation of Catholicism that stressed the “universal” definition of the word and increasingly focused on the creation of liturgical arts. It was not until his arrival in the Pacific Islands, however, that his art again began to synthesize his ideas with those of local cultures, infusing his art with the same passion observable in his Mexican portfolio.”⁵⁰⁷ For Klarr, the true transformation of Charlot’s work happens after the artist settled in Hawai‘i. Mexico was the inspiration for his future work in which he engaged further with different cultures and embraced liturgical art more fully as a mechanism for communicating with the people.

One of the best literal combinations of Charlot’s interest in the presentation of religious imagery and its implications for the larger social justice movement are a series of posters that he created for peace protests in the 1960s. These posters were made for an annual Marian rally at Honolulu Stadium where attendants gathered to pray to Mary for peace. The design of the posters is minimal. They differ from the artists’ earlier prints, particularly those created in collaboration with Kistler, which were much more colorful. For a poster made for a rally on Thursday May 1, 1963, Charlot depicts Mary in profile holding baby Jesus on her lap (fig. 95). Across the top of the print, Charlot includes a phrase in the ancient Hawaiian language, “Maluhia Ma O Malia” in bold capital letters. The translation appears in smaller type and in parentheses below, “Peace through Mary.” The globe is the focus of the composition as the Christ child motions to it as if to make Mary aware that worldly things are of great concern.

The following year, Charlot played with the form of Mary’s cloak more, showing various folds in the garment and revealing stars underneath (fig. 96). The stars might

⁵⁰⁷ Klarr, 30.

function as a reference to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but in Charlot's representation they are also evocative of the American flag. A third poster design for the 1966 rally possesses a blue color palette and presents Mary holding baby Jesus above her head (fig. 97). In this print, Christ is held up by Mary for all to see him as a symbol of peace. The long clean lines used to represent the figure of Mary in these socially relevant posters are similar to the technique that Charlot used in his Stations of the Cross for St. William's Church on the island of Kaua'i in 1958 addressed in Chapter III.

When reflecting on the Mexican mural movement, Charlot emphasized its inherent relationship with a quest for social justice. He wrote, "Present-day Mexico, oil rich and politically stable, could easily look with disdain on the Mexico we knew and loved, crisscrossed by illiterate chieftains leading unwashed peasants to slaughter. Were it not that our painted walls document this yearning for justice that made today's Mexico a reality."⁵⁰⁸ The Mexican murals serve as historical documents of a particular moment crafted by a group of artists with strong viewpoints about Mexican culture. Though in hindsight the approach may seem romantic, the muralists were motivated by their concern for humanity. John Charlot explains his father's approach:

Charlot accepted the idea of the religious life as a progress towards goodness and a closer relationship with God. His differences from mainstream teaching are revealed in the absence of the word purgative from his writings. First, although he practiced a strict, at first even scrupulous, morality himself, Charlot gradually moved away from a conventional Catholic view of suppression of sin as the central concern towards one in which sin was dissolved in one's positive relationship with God. Morality became a positive effort to do good, which led one closer to God.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Jean Charlot, foreword to *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998 (1977)), x.

⁵⁰⁹ John Charlot, "Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 3.7 Christianity."

In the United States both Charlot and Ramos Martínez's murals were also products of humanitarian motivations, but their approach to their work in the United States was much more personal and faith-based, than a part of an effort to ensure historical patrimony.

Charlot and Ramos Martínez's murals continue to resonate with the people in the communities in which they were created. Shortly after they were completed, many individuals wrote letters of praise to Charlot in honor of the freshly completed frescoes. In a brief, but emotional letter the people of Naiseralagi, Fiji acknowledged Charlot's arduous work.⁵¹⁰ They thanked Charlot for leaving his home and spending time in Fiji to create a large mural cycle. They refer to themselves as poor people, and they mention that although they could not pay for the mural they "beseech almighty God that he may take care of you and your family though this short life."⁵¹¹ Likewise, Ramos Martínez's major gift to the arts of Mexico was his passion for art education and the Open Air Schools, while his most important contribution to the arts in the United States were the frescoes he created; they welcomed people (La Avenida Café and Mary, Star of the Sea) and offered them solace in times of need (Santa Barbara Cemetery).

Almost two decades after Ramos Martínez's death and as Charlot approached the twilight of his career, the Catholic Church in the United States and in Latin America became increasingly motivated by social aims. During the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, churches linked their commitment to God and their commitment to break down oppression.⁵¹² Similarly in Latin America, local priests began to preach "liberation

⁵¹⁰ People of Naiseralagi to Jean Charlot, 5 December 1962, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² David L. Weaver-Zercher, "Theologies," *Themes in Religion and American Culture*, ed. Philip Goff and Paul Harvey (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 33.

theology” to the region’s poorest members who were encouraged to speak directly to God, who could hear their desire for economic and political freedoms. Furthermore, in both the United States and Latin America, Church leaders encouraged those who were not poor to identify with those who were less fortunate and to work to lift people from poverty. In the United States, “American bishops have called on Catholics to examine themselves in relation to the poor of the country and of the world, to share what they have with them and to extend the kind of help that enables poor peoples to help themselves out of poverty.”⁵¹³ This direct connection to faith and a commitment to social responsibility for others occurred in works created by Charlot and Ramos Martínez. Moreover, their representation of native cultures aligned them with oppressed populations. In some ways, Charlot and Ramos Martínez were liturgical artists before their time, as their work possesses strong connections to the Civil Rights Movement and liberation theology.

⁵¹³ Mary Jo Weaver, “American Catholics in the Twentieth Century,” *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture*, ed. Peter W. Williams (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 154–167.



Fig. 93. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, Fruit Vendors with Baskets, c. 1936

Conte crayon and tempera on newsprint, 22 3/4 x 17 1/8 inches

Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College, Gift of L.O. Wright

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Fig. 94. Alfredo Ramos Martínez, *Defender*, c. 1932
 Tempera and conte crayon on newsprint, 21 x 15 1/2 inches
 in Margarita Nieto and Louis Stern, *Alfredo Ramos Martínez & Modernismo*, ed. Marie Chambers. (Los Angeles: The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, 2009), 84.
 ©The Alfredo Ramos Martínez Research Project, Reproduced by permission.



Fig. 95 Jean Charlot, Untitled (Maluhia Ma O Malia), 1963

Print, 22 x 14 1/4 inches

Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Photograph by author

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Fig. 96. Jean Charlot, Untitled (Maluhia Ma O Malia), 1964
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu,
 Hawai'i
 Print, 22 x 14 1/4 inches
 Photograph by author
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.



Fig. 97. Jean Charlot, Untitled (Marian Rally: To Jesus through Mary), 1966
 Print, 22 x 14 1/4 inches
 Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library,
 Honolulu, Hawai'i.
 Photograph by author
 © The Jean Charlot Estate LLC. With permission.

VI. CONCLUSION

In *Mexican Memories*, Zohmah Day Charlot poignantly described her time in Mexico:

With all this cultural activity going on I didn't want to be left out so I decided to do some painting, too. Ione and Victor, however, thought my work was dreadful. They criticized my first efforts so much that I gave up working and read a book. I had to admit that the painting Ione started at the same time was better than mine. But what was I going to do if I couldn't paint? I felt worse when I received more money from my father. Along with a letter telling me not to drink and smoke. A week or so later, though, I decided to ignore their opinions. I took a sketch book and walked through the backstreets of Coyoacán, drawing pictures of the children playing. They were not very good. When I discovered that out for myself I really began to learn about art.⁵¹⁴

Here, Zohmah referred to Ione Robinson and Victor Arnautoff, American artists who participated in the Mexican Mural Renaissance, most notably assisting Diego Rivera on his murals for the National Palace.⁵¹⁵ She also referenced Coyoacán, the famed neighborhood that was home to so many artists in the first half of the twentieth century, including at one time both Charlot and Ramos Martínez. In a very personal way, Zohmah revealed her own artistic inspirations and struggles in Mexico as an emerging artist. Simultaneously she describes the great artistic movement happening in Mexico City during the first half of the twentieth century.

In similar fashion to Zohmah's own description of her earliest artistic conflicts and inspiration in Mexico, Charlot and Ramos Martínez both struggled in Mexico to define themselves while simultaneously being impacted by Mexican culture. While Mexico was a great source of inspiration for Charlot and Ramos Martínez, and a dynamic

⁵¹⁴ Zohmah Charlot, *Mexican Memories*, 1931, 22.

⁵¹⁵ Arnautoff later created murals in the United States. Most notably, he produced a mural for Coit Tower in San Francisco, California.

influence that would stay with them throughout their careers, they both struggled to hit a consistent stride in their work. Charlot longed to create more murals, but found few opportunities in Mexico. Ramos Martínez was besieged by the controversies surrounding the country's most prestigious art academy and the development of the Open Air Schools. In the United States, both artists found loyal supporters. Charlot found stability through teaching and through consistent mural commissions at universities and churches. Ramos Martínez's mural production developed after he moved to the United States, and he found considerable interest in his work both in the form of exhibitions and among patrons in Hollywood, California. Charlot and Ramos Martínez, after settling in the United States, developed a way to make works that recalled their past influences, but also demonstrated new found artistic freedom and inspiration.

Although the last five chapters have examined ways the Mexican mural movement influenced Charlot and Ramos Martínez, and how both artists contributed to the diversification of American visual culture during the twentieth century, not everyone was taken with the work of the muralists. In assessing the lack of interest in mural-making among new generations Charlot stated, "Thus it appears that the mural renaissance may spend itself within the lifetime of its pioneers."⁵¹⁶ While the Mexican mural movement had plateaued by 1950, Charlot remained loyal to the movement. This dissertation seeks to revive discussion of the breadth of work produced by Charlot and Ramos Martínez with attention to the unexpected places where they finished murals and their contribution to continuing the Mexican mural movement in the United States. Specifically, this project examines how individual works are emblematic of their entire

⁵¹⁶Jean Charlot, preface to *Mexican Mural Renaissance*, viii.

body of work and life experiences shaped the art they produced. Of all the ways in which their personal lives shaped their careers, the practice of Catholicism inspired their artistic production in the most dramatic manner.

The extent to which Charlot and Ramos Martínez were influenced by Catholicism is hard to determine given the fact that faith can be a personal and at times very private practice; however, both artists made works that were overtly religious and without question, related to their Catholic faith. Both economic viability and a commitment to social justice were intertwined with their religious art. Though neither was paid great sums for their religious works, they were consistently commissioned to create new work which was subsequently received well by their patrons. Perhaps as a result of, but at the very least in tandem to, the artists' interest in depicting native tradition was tied to their commitment to social justice. While both artists' work might be viewed as romantic or exotic portrayals of the native populations of Mexico, the artists themselves expressed great respect for the diversity of Mexico. By readily repeating works that present flower vendors, mothers, and women wearing *rebozos* or braids with ribbons, they raised the profile of native traditions in the United States. When pursuing religious commissions for small local churches, a cemetery chapel, or a religiously-affiliated university, Charlot and Ramos Martínez challenged viewers' notions of liturgical art. They brought spiritually-motivated art into the modern era as opposed to simply replicating religious art of the past.

This dissertation raises many questions about the role of both artists in art education, the nuanced meanings behind their representations of the indigenous populations, and their connection to Catholicism, but there are more aspects to be

examined in future studies. For example, this dissertation looks at broad issues pertaining to the ways in which Charlot and Ramos Martínez negotiated their shifts across the US/Mexico Border and emphasizes the way in which these artists succeeded in the United States where they embraced both representations of the indigenous population and religious art. A secondary study, however, could specifically emphasize the influences of Southern California on both artists and their impact in the region. Place or more specifically geographic context can greatly impact art production. My project recognizes the influences of living in Mexico during the 1920s and then studies how subsequent moves to the United States were catalysts for artistic production for Charlot and Ramos Martínez. The process of immigration and these artists' roles as outsiders in various communities in which they lived affected the work they created. While these broad issues of translation and negotiation are evident in my work, the way in which these artists functioned in specific geographic spaces could provide enough substantive material for an additional study. This project looked specifically at Ramos Martínez in Los Angeles, but there is more to be addressed pertaining to both artists' time in the city, and in particular, Charlot's impact on Los Angeles and how his collaborations with Lynton Kistler reinvigorated the printmaking scene there. In terms of Ramos Martínez's body of work, examining the way in which his construction of Mexican identity influenced subsequent generations of artists in Los Angeles can reveal the lasting way in which the artist left an imprint on the city.⁵¹⁷ Like a focused place-based study on Southern

⁵¹⁷ In a June 11, 2010 conversation with artist, curator, writer and a resident of Los Angeles since 2002, Rubén Ortiz-Torres (b.1964) suggested to me that Ramos Martínez's work marks a major moment in which the "Mexican" in Los Angeles is formed and that his work marks the divide between the modernists and the post-modernists like himself who create work in reaction to Ramos Martínez's conceptualization of Mexican identity in the U.S. Ortiz-Torres addresses some of these ideas in his forthcoming exhibition at the

California, a study on the artists' works in Europe offers another avenue of inquiry. Little research has been done on Charlot and Ramos Martínez, and particularly Ramos Martínez's experiences in Europe. In contrast, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera's tenure in Europe has been heavily discussed, while Ramos Martínez's experiences have been practically ignored.⁵¹⁸ Place-based studies on Charlot's liturgical work on the island of Kaua'i, in the Midwest, and in Tempe, Arizona at Arizona State University are all ripe for further examination. There is a plethora of materials on Charlot in Tempe that would aid further research and because the mural is unusual for Charlot due to its bright color palette and presentation of Native American rituals of the Southwest, it presents an exciting opportunity to know more about the artist's work.⁵¹⁹

Charlot's legacy continues through his enormous artistic production, but despite his rich and varied artistic production it is surprising that he is not better known. In the history of art, Charlot is most often associated with Mexican muralism; nevertheless the Mexican mural movement was driven by a nationalist agenda in which Mexican artists have been reviewed as the greatest innovators and recipients of the most prominent commissions. Despite his pivotal role in the development of Mexican modernism, Charlot was an outsider. Furthermore, Charlot has only one major mural in Mexico at the National Preparatory School and though he is noted for his printmaking, he left Mexico

Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach and his accompanying book, *Mex/L.A.: Mexican Modernisms* (Fall 2011).

⁵¹⁸ *The Cubist Paintings of Diego Rivera: Memory, Politics, Place* (Spring 2004) at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Portraits, 1913-1917* (Summer 2009) at the Meadows Museum, Dallas, Texas.

⁵¹⁹ While at one time archivists were very interested in the Charlot mural in Arizona (as someone has kept the historical photographs, newspapers, and correspondence well intact), interest at the University has dwindled over time. When I contacted the curator at the Arizona State University Art Museum, she had to make sure that the work was still visible and shared with me that not too long ago there was a movement on campus to remove the mural.

before the founding of the Taller de Gráfica Popular in 1937. The same is true of Ramos Martínez who left Mexico at a pivotal time in the development of Mexican modernism. The move led to his in-between status as opposed to viewing him as an important figure in the development of both American and Mexican art.

Although moving to the United States was a catalyst for mural production for both artists, Charlot was critical of the way in which Americans viewed art, “I tried once to boil down to a very simple statement. I said that art in the United States is a question of buying and selling and art in Mexico is a question of making it.”⁵²⁰ Despite the fact that neither artist is overly celebrated by either American nor Mexican scholars, both artists remain better known in Mexico than they are in the United States. The historical period now identified as the National Renaissance in the visual arts of Mexico began while Charlot and Ramos Martínez were still living in the country, and scholars have examined thoroughly the artistic circles in which *los tres grandes* operated. Because of their proximity to Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco, Charlot and Ramos Martínez have often been viewed as footnotes to the stories of the more-renowned muralists. Another criticism levied by Charlot pertained to the economic disparity between small-scale works and murals. He stated, “Furthermore you can’t buy or sell murals. And really that counts very much against mural painting.”⁵²¹ The lack of consistent economic viability pertaining to mural production affected Charlot and Ramos Martínez and it continues to have resonance today. While many muralists continue to work in the United States and certainly graffiti art has achieved unprecedented success in recent years, the artists who

⁵²⁰ Oral history interview with Jean Charlot, 1961 Aug. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

make murals cannot sell their work in the same fashion as the more financially successful artists working, which is problematic when their work becomes de-valued by galleries, In a financially driven art market, the de-valuation of mural art makes muralists' lives complicated.

While murals have often been viewed as derivative and propagandistic, their perseverance as expressions of community cannot be denied. In fact, murals continue to have performative functions in which they reinforce prescribed roles of identity and act as agents of cultural expression. Specifically related to this project, murals continue to retain a strong presence in predominately Mexican neighborhoods like Barrio Logan in San Diego, the Mission District in San Francisco, and Pilsen in Chicago. Chicano Park provides a home for murals in San Diego, though other locations in the city like El Centro Cultural de la Raza also possess murals. In the fall of 2011, The San Diego Museum of Art embarked on collaborative with Writerz Blok, a local graffiti collaborative who realized a mural in response to the Museum's collection of Mexican art and the exhibition, *Mexican Modern Painting from the Andrés Balaen Collection*. In San Francisco, murals populate Balmy Alley in Mission District, where Precita Eyes, a not-for-profit organization, maintains guardianship over much of the mural tradition and offers classes in the art form.⁵²² In Chicago, murals persevere throughout the neighborhoods of Pilsen and Little Village. On a prominent scale they decorate the 18th stop on the Pink Line as a part of the Chicago Transit Authority while other reinterpretations of murals appear in the form of graffiti and visual narratives represented in alleyways and on garage doors. The artists who participated in the Chicano mural

⁵²² Founded in 1977, Precita Eyes is located at 2981 24th Street in San Francisco, California.

movement in the 1960s and 1970s and continue to create murals are rarely considered to be a part of the larger history of contemporary art. Like Charlot and Ramos Martínez before them, their work rests outside of contemporary art narratives. Though Chicano muralists receive some recognition through exhibitions in Southern California, for the most part, the rest of the country avoids their work.

Rather poignantly, historian Matthew A. Redinger writes, “Geography brought them together, but history drove them apart. This is the fundamental reality in relations between the United States and Mexico.”⁵²³ While history and certain political policy continue to drive these two countries apart, art brings the two countries together. From colonial times to the present, artists and art have crossed the boundaries of these nations and affected the cultural milieu in foreign territories. The first half of the twentieth century saw a rush of artists, writers, and scholars moving to Mexico City to engage in the post-Revolutionary politics of the country. This dissertation is not a comprehensive account of Mexican muralism in the United States; instead it focuses specifically on two artists and aims to reveal the exceptional story of the presence of Mexican muralism in the United States. There is still room for an exhaustive account of this widespread influence. Many have told aspects of this story, but a comprehensive account remains elusive.

The use of primary and secondary sources and the analysis of many works of art that are without previous in-depth study weaves a thorough account of the work produced by Charlot and Ramos Martínez after their encounter with Mexican muralism in the 1920s. By focusing on a select group of objects by these artists that are emblematic of

⁵²³ Redinger, ix.

their *oeuvre*, relationships between the artists' shared spiritual vision and their commitment to the indigenous cultures of Mexico become evident. Beyond the use of primary and secondary sources and the reference to particular works, concepts of place, colonialism, and performance are subtle frameworks that reverberate throughout this analysis. The geographic context in which the artists lived greatly informs how their work is understood. By living in Mexico City during one of the most important artistic moments in the history of Mexico, Charlot and Ramos Martínez were formed by their relationship with the country's cultural, political, and economic identity. Likewise, the process of negotiating the distinctive cities in which they settled in the United States, Charlot in Honolulu and Ramos Martínez in Los Angeles, affected their work. By crossing the US/Mexico Border they became a part of a complex narrative of immigration between two countries with a tense political history, a dependent economic relationship history, and an increasingly rich and varied shared cultural tradition.

Colonialism continued to be a major factor in art produced in Mexico after the end of Spanish imperialism in Mexico. The political and economic domination of one society over another sustain the thread of colonialism. Despite the end of Spanish rule, the indigenous societies of Mexico continued a colonial existence as the wealthy, landowning sectors of Mexico still exerted control. This inequity, and specifically the adherence to traditional culture despite this discrimination, made the indigenous cultures of Mexico great artistic muses to many Mexican modern painters like Ramos Martínez and the foreign artists like Charlot who joined them. Also, colonialism is inherent in the approach of the artists as foreigners. Neither artist was a member of an indigenous community, they were outsiders who usurped traditional customs and focused on beauty.

Though they were aware of the struggle of the people, they avoided painful representations and instead, for the most part, focused on tranquil everyday life experience and more tender images like portraits of mothers and their children. Perhaps most obviously, the presentation of religious subject matter indirectly suggests colonialism in that it is a form of art linked to the Catholic Church, the most powerful institution active in the colonial Americas, and the most prominent institution that remains in Mexico from the colonial period. Charlot and Ramos Martínez's murals for religious spaces were designed with consideration for the performative nature of these murals. As decorative surfaces in places where religious services occur, Charlot and Ramos Martínez created works that inspired prayer and offered a pathway for spiritual practice. The way in which both artists navigated their roles as muralists and as immigrants to the United States and participated in the construction of both Mexican and Catholic imagery in a foreign country also has performative undertones.

Charlot and Ramos Martínez took what they needed from post-Revolutionary Mexico, immigrated to the United States, and created new work that was different from their previous artistic production. Charlot became a sought after liturgical artist and Ramos Martínez embraced Catholicism and Mexican culture in a way he had never before. Ramos Martínez's liturgical art career was cut short when he died during this third major project, planned stained glass windows for a church in Los Angeles. Given Charlot's success in the 1950s and 1960s with religious commissions, Ramos Martínez might have also achieved the same success had he lived longer. John Charlot wrote of his father Jean, "Art was his religious mission and thus could not be produced in separation

from his religious life.”⁵²⁴ For both Charlot and Ramos Martínez, art and religion were intertwined. They saw art through the lens of their own Catholic experience and pursued religious imagery in their own distinctive ways that separated them from their peers and transformed their careers from Breton-inspired young men to Mexican muralist-infused practice, and finally, to a wholly original artistic practice that was a product of diverse influences.

As mentioned previously, Charlot and Ramos Martínez are not a part of the canon of modern art. They are tethered closely to the developments in Mexico, but due to the fact that they left the country they are treated, if at all, as minor figures. In the US they are viewed as Mexicans tied to the Mexican mural movement and therefore their work is not viewed in concert with American art history. The appearance of religious imagery more readily in their later work presented a problem for both American and Mexican art historical narratives as traditionally religious art has been viewed as insignificant to the development of modernism. In the Protestant-dominated United States, religious art was deemed as too foreign to prevailing avant-garde trends and in Mexico, religious work was not radical enough; instead, art associated with Catholicism represents a reactionary way of thinking about the political, social, and cultural climate as opposed to revolutionary.

To conclude, it is imperative to return to Homi Bhabha’s words in the introduction to this project. Bhabha wrote about the articulation of cultural difference, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of

⁵²⁴ John Charlot, “Jean Charlot: Life and Work, 5.4. Religion.”

historical transformation.”⁵²⁵ By borrowing liberally from these ideas put forth by Bhabha, the very nature of the work of Charlot and Ramos Martínez produced in the United States is revealed. These artists’ physical presence in the United States and the murals they made offered a different perspective on societal norms. As a result of Charlot and Ramos Martínez’s continual negotiation of their identities as immigrants, as muralists with ties to Mexico, and as religious artists, the work they created in the United States offers examples of complex and distinctive cultural hybridities. It would be possible to just write this dissertation about Charlot, as his involvement with liturgical arts was enormous and it could be the subject of a multivolume inquiry. Certainly the emphasis remains on Charlot here, but by bringing Ramos Martínez into the discussion, both artists’ exceptional characteristics are enhanced and a greater understanding of the long, rich, and varied tradition of art that permeates the US/Mexico Border is advanced.

⁵²⁵ Bhabha, 2.

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