

FRESCO MURALS AT UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

By JEAN CHARLOT

● On my arrival in Athens, Lamar Dodd suggested the making of a fresco. A tour of the campus guided by Reuben Gambrell, who had himself painted an excellent mural in the Demonstration School, uncovered two likely places. An octagonal lantern shaft in the Language Building presented tempting problems with its optical foreshortening of verticals and eight narrow walls joined at 45 degree angle. My final choice fell on a frieze 9' x 12' that tops the facade of the Fine Arts Building.

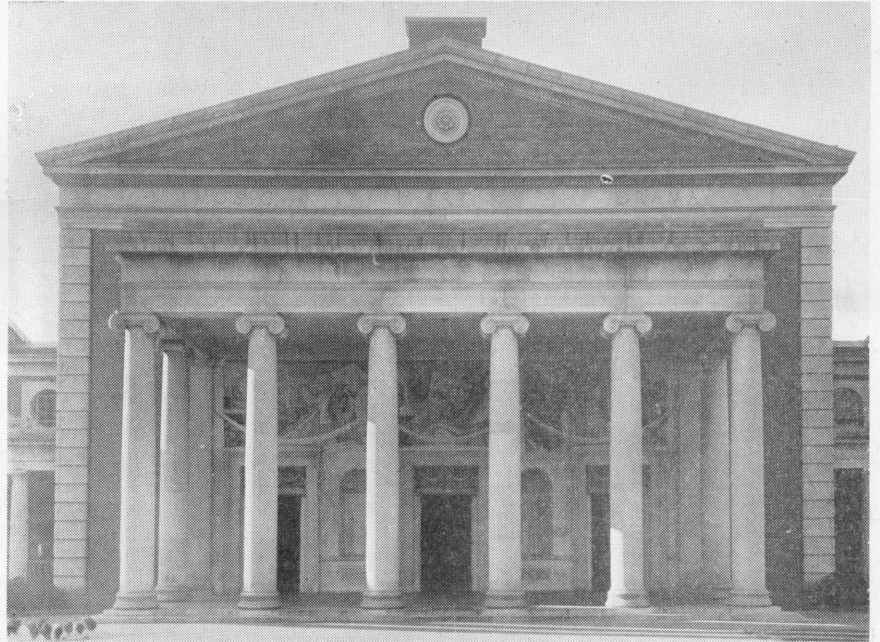
The wall is pierced by three doors that suggest a division in three panels. The building is put to a triple use, its left wing dedicated to art courses, its center an auditorium, its right wing given over to the music department. Fronting the facade is a portico supported by Ionic columns that break the wall in three panels from all but excessively close points of view. Those coincidences suggested a tripartite division. The one that obeys the placement of the doors is logical within the wall space but disregarded the columns that stand between spectator and spectacle. A correct optical partitioning should take into account the shifting visual relationship between columns and wall.

The left panel treats of the Plastic Arts. In it the painter is seen working on a composition, a mathematical diagram rationalizing the proportions of man: the sculptor is seen attacking with hammer and chisel a piece of marble. Thus the painter symbolizes the conception of the work of art in the world of thought, while the sculptor symbolizes its execution in terms of material used. There is also the potter, and near him a potter's wheel of archaic type, a hint of future industrialization and machine-made art. The three artists cluster around a seated woman, "The sybil", crowned with gold laurels and holding the plumbline and square suggestive of the discipline and method that must reign even in the arts.

The central panel features the Theater. Two women holding masks symbolize Comedy and Tragedy. To emphasize the unreality inherent in stage-acting, each holds a mask opposite her true nature; although persons looking at the mural can appreciate this point as they see both masks and wearers, the spectators painted at each side of the central group remains under the

spell of the theatrical illusion, laugh at Comedy and are stirred by Tragedy; exceptions are a child and a dog who prove impervious to this make-believe. Over the middle door is seated the author who receives those varied moods from humanity and returns them enriched; on the scroll on which he writes we read a Greek inscription "Athens the Beautiful," that serves as general title for the whole fresco.

The right panel represents Music. On the right a trio is playing. Goatfooted Pan blows his pipe; half animal, half human, he marks the transition between nature's and man's music; the cymbal player typifies the extrovert activities of music, i. e., jazz in our own age; the harpist, in meditative concentration, represents the introvert appreciation of classical works. On the left a group of singers shows music as a social activity that binds individuals to one mood; the masked singer ties this panel with the central theatre theme. All are grouped around the Conductor; with her left hand she beats the meter, while on her other perches a bird that intones the absolute pitch.



FINE ARTS BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA,
SHOWING THE FRESCO MURALS BY JEAN CHARLOT

The Craft of a Fresco Painter

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● As one watches a fresco painting grow he becomes conscious of the singular fact that architectural design, painting, and the crafts are welded into one perception. Each is conceived as a related part and the parts are merged into the complete ensemble: the fresco to the building, the graphic idea to the big organic image.

In any activity that is somewhat strange to us we are apt to confuse manual craftsmanship with art. Skill is artisanship, not art. The fresco painter must be an excellent craftsman. He uses care and precision in each phase of his work. He mixes compatible colors. He understands the chemistry of pigments and his paints become an integral part of the plastered wall. His exploratory drive leads him into activities of search for ways of expression which are peculiar to his craft.

The artist must not become a slave to his materials. He must respect them: he must govern his design by their limitations; but, ultimately, his craft becomes a direct means for expressing his desires and he is free to create in visual rhythms consistent with tools and materials which he uses.