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JUAN CORDERO

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICAN MURALIST

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CRITICAL estimates of Mexican art are concerned as a rule with three standardized facets, pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern. Thus a single country is made to shoulder three modes so contrasted as to appear unrelated spiritually, stylistically, and even as to the choice of mediums. Indeed an expert eye is needed to appreciate the thin thread of concordances that links the monolithic Aztec *Coatlícue*, the Cathedral of Mexico City, and the Marxist frescoes of the Ministry of Education.

In a field not yet overburdened with scholarly research, critics naturally selected the outstanding artistic morsels. With each critic boosting his own field exclusively, the body of Mexican art tradition was nearly severed in three writhing slices.

The neglected periods are the transitional ones, which are needed to understand Mexicanism as one living organ, confined in space and spread in time. They correspond to the emergence of Mexico out of two deathly crises. The first follows the Conquest, when a stark psychological surgery severed ancestral thought and attendant styles, offering in exchange to confused Indian *tlacuiles* models from the full-blown European Renaissance.¹

The second period follows upon the success of the struggle for political independence that cuts Mexico from the

apron strings of Mother Spain at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Independence dries up a liberal royal allowance to the Academy of San Carlos, and foments in artists left to shift for themselves the obscure cognizance that an unavoidable stylistic conflict with Europe is stirring.²

The current critical by-passing of the nineteenth century knocks logical props from under Mexican modern art, and tends to make of it a sort of unmotivated explosion realized in a void. Any discussion of the topic would acquire increased meaning if it were based on a more thorough knowledge of near antecedents.

Juan Cordero (1824-84) is a trustful witness to his century and its peculiar quandaries. Chronologically, his life is planted at its core. He was born three years after the political consummation of his country's independence, and he died when that austere muralist, José Clemente Orozco, was a bawling two-year-old (Fig. 1).

Cordero's ideology bridges the span between eighteenth-century theology and Comtist positivism; his murals link, in a nearly single-handed feat, the plentiful harvest of colonial decoration with the new mural plenty. Another reason to recount his life is that the accepted official version has been colored by the partisan interests that worked against him in his lifetime. A corrected version makes clear

1. *Tlacuile* means painter. I use the Náhuatl word because the rôle of the pre-Hispanic artist was so distinct from that of the present-day painter. Perhaps closer to those of the *tlacuile* are the functions of the Indian sandpainters of New Mexico, whose compositions claim power over rains and crops. Pre-Hispanic painting was also picture writing, indispensable to religion, literature, and science.

Influences worked both ways, with Indian forms invading in return the imported Renaissance themes. The first Christian sermons in Mexico were illustrated by sets of paintings that quickly familiarized natives with European forms. In turn, the friars adopted, at first for the sake of clarity, Indian modes of pictorial expression that blended rather easily with the complicated symbolical constructions that were then a European fashion. The two-way stylistic traffic has been studied in architecture more thoroughly than in painting. A balance of both influences inspired the engravings of the Mexican Fray Diego Valadés. Consult, on this artist, Francisco de la Maza, "Fray Diego Valadés, escritor y grabador franciscano del siglo XVI," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, no. 13, Mexico, 1945, pp. 15-44.

2. Written in 1875, a passage from José Martí is typical of the trend; in it the author uses the present tense to describe a dream-wish rather than actual paintings, "Vigorous painters do not turn their eyes any more toward schools that were great only because they reflected original epochs. . . . They copy the light in the *Xinantecatl*, and pain on the features of *Cuauhtemotzin*. They guess how contracted were the limbs of the doomed man stretched on the stone of sacrifices. They snatch from their imagination the gesture of compassion and the bitter tears that an irresistible love for Cortez and the pity felt for the miserable lot of her brothers, put on Marina's face." First published in *La Revista Universal*, December 29, 1875, the passage is reprinted in José Martí, "Arte en México 1875-1876," *Martí en México* (Prologo, compilación y notas de Camilo Carranca y Trujillo), Mexico, 1940, III, pp. 83-84.

This passage confuses, as is still often done, the birth of a national style with the advent of local subject matter. But it foresees the tragic mood that was to characterize present-day Mexican painting.

the debt owed him by Mexican art, and especially by Mexican mural painting.³

Juan Cordero was born in Teziutlan, in the state of Puebla, to the Mexican wife of a Spanish tradesman. He went as an adolescent to the capital to study art at the National Academy.

Founded in 1785 to inculcate better manners in colonial artists who champed dangerously at the royal bit, the Academy was a proud school, second only to that of Madrid.⁴ Mexico does not often leave the traveler unmoved, and we see the Spaniards sent as crown foremen alternately spewed forth or digested by the strong milieu. Don Cosme de Acuña, second of the directors of painting, found the Americas so disturbing that he proposed to ship to Madrid the Mexican Academy and its students, his alternative being suicide.⁵ His successor, Don Rafael Ximeno y Planes,

3. The only extensive biography of Cordero to date is that written by Manuel G. Revilla among his biographies of artists, and included in *Obras*, Mexico, V. Agueros, 1908, I, pp. 251-287.

A professor at San Carlos Academy, Revilla naturally sided with Clavé in what relates to the Clavé-Cordero feud. Even more insidious is the silence of José Bernardo Couto concerning Cordero's mural achievements. Couto was of course an active participant on the side of Clavé, and against Cordero.

The exhibition of the work of Cordero at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, in the summer of 1945, illustrates the revised estimate. On this occasion, Diego Rivera pointed out in his talk the fact that Cordero painted in Mexico the first public mural with a lay subject matter. Rivera also gave him credit for painting in true fresco, a claim that cannot well be sustained by fact: Cordero's existing murals are either oil or tempera, and the destroyed one is described by his contemporaries as a tempera. However, this in no way belittles Cordero's importance, either as a muralist or as a precursor of modern murals.

4. Documents found in Madrid that concern the Mexican Academy were published by Genaro Estrada, *Algunos papeles para la historia de las Bellas Artes en México. Documentos de la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando de Madrid relativos a la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos de México*, Mexico, 1935.

The principle of subjection is stated in a letter of 1793 that deplores the creation of the Mexican Academy as a political mistake, "There is no doubt that this political body is opposed to the system . . . that should rule the relations of the colonies with the mother country, scrupulously keeping the narrow dependence in which the former should be to the latter, after elemental and incontrovertible principles. But the political error being now committed, and it being too late to repair the damage . . . relations between both bodies should endeavor to keep the Academy of San Carlos in a certain natural and willing dependence to the Academy of San Fernando, mother of all those of its type, and established where the Sovereign resides" (*idem*, pp. 53-54).

The importance of the school is defined by an etiquette ruling that a director of painting of the Mexican Academy attending meetings of the Madrid Academy was entitled to the seat next to that of the oldest director of the Madrid Academy. *Idem*, pp. 57-64.

5. Don Cosme de Acuña writes to a Madrid friend and fellow academian in 1788, "Mucho dolor me causa en verme de esta suerte, el que me llegaria aquitar la Vida si no fuese la esperanza que tengo de poner el remedio que anuncie a Vmd. en la antecedente a esta qe. es regresarme a España. . . ." Genaro Estrada, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

As to the transplantation of the school to Madrid, see José

thrived instead on the pungent diet, weathered the Independence, married and died in Mexico, having added great tempera paintings to its proud list of murals.⁶ The prenatal cornerstone of Cordero's mural career is the decoration that Ximeno finished in 1813 in the Chapel of Christ of the Church of Santa Teresa, based on episodes of the miraculous *renovación* of the sixteenth-century crucifix around which the chapel was built.⁷

After Independence, the school had increasing difficulties in meeting expenses, paid until then by the Crown and the wealthy silver mine trust. In the unique file of prize student drawings preserved at the Academy, begun the year of its foundation and kept up to 1912, a gap between 1827 and 1840 tells of difficulties that texts confirm.⁸

Bernardo Couto, *Diálogo sobre la historia de la pintura en México*, Mexico, Imprenta de I. Escalante y Cia. Bajos de San Agustín, no. 1, 1872, p. 91, and corollary note 60, p. 122, "Así resulta de las actas de sesiones de la junta superior de gobierno de la Academia."

6. Besides the murals of the first Santa Teresa Chapel, one should mention the decoration of the dome of the metropolitan cathedral, and that of the ceiling of the chapel of the Palacio de Minería, both painted in tempera.

7. *Renovación*, renovation, was the name given to the miracle on which the devotion to this crucifix was based. As both Ximeno y Planes and Cordero painted some of its incidents, a résumé of the facts helps an understanding of their subject matter.

The crucifix was made of weak material, molded cardboard and a paste of corncobs. After being exposed in a village church from 1545 to 1615, it collapsed into shapelessness, blackened. Of the head only the beard remained, where rats made their nest. It was seen in this sorry state by the bishop, who condemned the image to destruction as unfit for the cult. In 1621, with accompaniment of unexplainable lights, voices, levitations, sweating and bleeding of the statue, the Christ restored itself to perfect shape and color.

When the archbishop ordered that the miraculous image be transferred to the capital, the neighborhood rose in arms, and the crucifix was kidnapped by two thousand Indians armed with bows and arrows. Eventually, it reached Mexico City, to be housed at first in a Carmelite convent, then in its own chapel whose construction lasted from 1798 to 1813. Don Manuel Tolsa was the sculptor in charge of the decoration, and worked with the painter Ximeno y Planes, as in the decoration of the chapel of the Minería.

While Ximeno used as his theme the armed affray incident to the translation, Cordero chose for the absidal semi-dome the levitation of the image, sustained by angels.

See Dr. D. Alfonso Alberto de Velasco, *Historia de la Milagrosa Renovación de la Soberana Imagen de Cristo Señor Nuestro Crucificado, que se venera en la Iglesia del Convento de Santa Teresa la Antigua*, written 1698, and often reprinted. I used the 1845 edition (Reimpresa en papel Mexicano, en la calle de la Palma num. 4).

8. The collection even antedates the creation of the Academy in 1783, as it contains drawings from the engraving school that preceded it, established in 1778. Jealously preserved and added to by the present librarian, Sr. Picaseño, the file is a precious index to the transitions of taste in Mexican art. In it are found drawings by the first masters of the Academy, Gil, Tolsa, Ginés de Aguirre, and Ximeno y Planes. Some of the student drawings are by men who became masters in turn: Patiño, Rebull, Pina, Velasco, Saturnino Herrán, Zárraga, Diego Rivera. There are no drawings by Cordero in the file.

On his visit to the school in 1803, Baron de Humboldt wrote:

In great rooms well lighted with Argand lamps, hundreds of adolescents gather at night. Some draw from the cast or from nature, while others copy furniture designs, candelabras and bronze ornaments. A striking feature, in a country where the discrimination of the nobility against castes is so rooted, is that all colors and races mix in these gatherings. Here Indian and half-breed sit side-by-side with white, here the son of the poor artisan may compete with those of the best families. . . .⁹

On her visit to the school in 1840, the Marquesa de Calderón de la Barca notes:

I unfortunately recollected having read Humboldt's brilliant account . . . the remains of those beautiful but mutilated plaster-casts, the splendid engravings which still exist, would alone make it probable; but the present disorder, the abandoned state of the building, the non-existence of these excellent classes of sculpture and painting, and, above all, the low state of the fine arts in Mexico at the present day, are amongst the sad proofs, if any were wanting, of the melancholy effects produced by years of civil war and unsettled government. . . .¹⁰

If we discount the undiplomatic prejudices that seeped into the mind of the Marquesa from her husband, the first ambassador sent by Spain to its runaway colony, it is true that the Academy had not recovered from the loss of the Crown pension.

It was in these lean years, which lasted until 1846,¹¹ that Cordero made his first art studies, beginning with copies from plaster casts and from engravings after Raphael, Gian Bologna, and the Caracci.¹² Though three centuries had elapsed since the Conquest, no Mexican artist could give himself wholeheartedly to an exclusively European fare. With an understanding of Mexico's split stylistic personality, Baron de Humboldt suggested that, alongside the *Apollon Belvedere* and the *Laocoön*, shown at the Academy, should be placed

. . . some of those colossal statues of basalt and porphyry, covered with Aztec hieroglyphs, and presenting certain analogies with the Egyptian style, and also the Hindu. It would indeed be most curious to place those monoliths that mark the first intellectual advance of our species, these works of a semi-

9. My translation from the Spanish edition, Baron A. de Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre la Nueva-España*, Segunda edición . . . traducida al castellano por Don Vicente González Arnao, Paris, en casa de Jules Renouard, 1827, I, pp. 234-235.

10. Madame C— de la B—, *Life in Mexico, During a Residence of Two Years in That Country*, with a preface by W. H. Prescott, London, Chapman and Hall, 186 Strand, 1843, p. 103.

11. Speaking in economic terms. Clavé started his reorganization of the school that year. Speaking in aesthetic terms, creative art was far from neglected in the impoverished school. A nationalist feeling was stronger then than it was later under a foreign director.

12. Subject matter of the preserved student drawings dating from the years when Cordero started to study art.

barbaric people living in the Mexican Andes, beside the beautiful forms born under the skies of Greece and Italy.¹³

The wise wish of the German Baron comes true for each Mexican artist in one guise or another. His taste is tried more often through live Indians than Indian statues. For Cordero the test came as a corollary to the depleted state of his purse, that called for some additional income besides the little his family could spare. Because he could not combine art studies with a full-time job, he chose the seasonal occupation of *mercero*, or peddler. A *costumbrista* serial of 1854 has preserved for us the essence of this picturesque vocation (Fig. 2).¹⁴

To become a full-fledged *mercero* one needed a basket and a yardstick, and merchandise neither bulky nor expensive, such as cloth, scissors, thread, thimbles, needles, baubles; also trinkets good for the soul, novenas, praises, good-mornings, leave-takings, all assorted prayers to saints now somewhat disused: San Atogenes, protector of pregnancies, Santa Polonia, mistress of toothaches, Santa Librada whose concern is thieves, and the patron of spinsters, a best seller:

Saint Francis of Paul,
Grant us three wishes:
Salvation, money,
And a good husband.¹⁵

Trekking from village to village, Cordero was plunged in a rustic American mediaeval milieu. From fair to pilgrimage, he witnessed pre-Hispanic survivals, plumed tribes offering ritual dances to revered statues, Náhuatl-spoken epics flung at the night skies, and the *volantines*, bird impersonators rotating in space and hung from a high pole.¹⁶

One should not look in the work of Cordero for folklore data about the scenes he witnessed, for he lacked the tourist point of view. Most Mexicans face within them-

13. The suggestion of Humboldt had its contemporary point. At the time, some large pieces from the main Aztec temple, among them the *Coatlícue*, had been discovered fortuitously; not knowing what to do with the find, the discoverers buried the carved blocks again. Humboldt, *Ensayo político* . . ., 1827, p. 233.

14. *Los Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos. Tipos y costumbres nacionales por varios autores*, Mexico, imp. de M. Murguía y Comp., 1854. Patterned after the earlier *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, this rare work is illustrated with lithographs by Iriarte and Campillo. "El Mercero," pp. 253-266, gives an idea of the appearance and activities of the young Cordero in his trade days.

15. *Los Mexicanos* . . ., p. 262:

San Francisco de Paula,
Tres cosas pido:
Salvacion y dinero
Y un buen marido!

16. One should note that such survivals were stronger at that period than now. Paraphernalia used a hundred years ago, and preserved today in the Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of Folk Art of Mexico City, is even more striking than that used today.

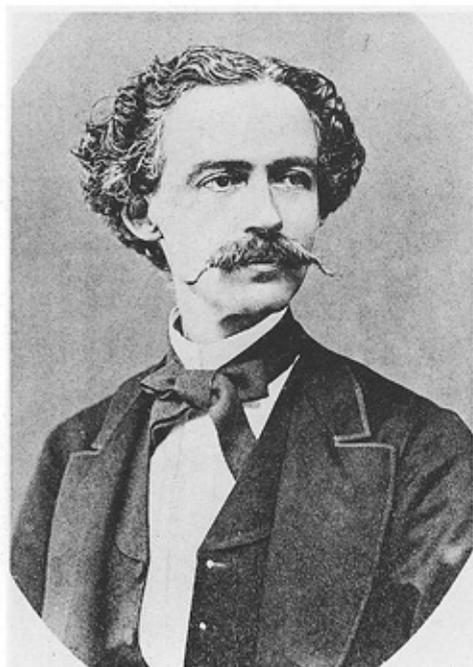


FIG. 1. Juan Cordero, from a Photograph in the Possession of Juan Leonardo Cordero, Grandson of the Artist



FIG. 2. El Mercero, Lithograph by A. Campillo, "Los Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos," 1854



FIG. 3. Mexico City, Galería de Pintura de México: Cordero, Colón ante los Reyes Católicos, 1850



FIG. 4. Self-Portrait as an Indian Slave, Detail of Fig. 3



FIG. 5. Mexico City, Santa Teresa: Lithograph of 1845



FIG. 7. Dedication, Detail of Fig. 3



FIG. 6. Mexico City, Galería de Pintura de México: Cordero, Retrato de los escultores Pérez y Valero, 1847



FIG. 8. Mexico City, Collection Sr. Rafael Manzo: Cordero, Sra. Dolores Tosta de Santa Anna, 1855



FIG. 9. Mexico City, Church of Jesús María: Cordero, Jesus among the Doctors

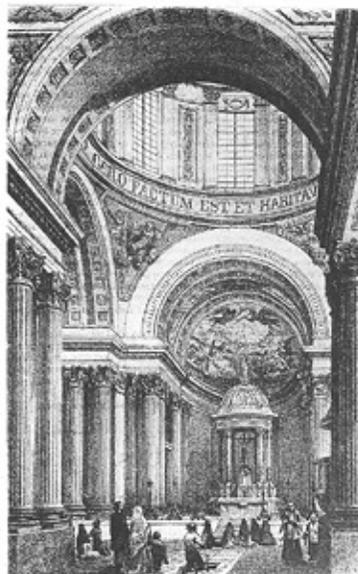


FIG. 10. "Capilla del Señor de Santa Teresa," Lithograph by Decaen, *La Cruz*, 1857

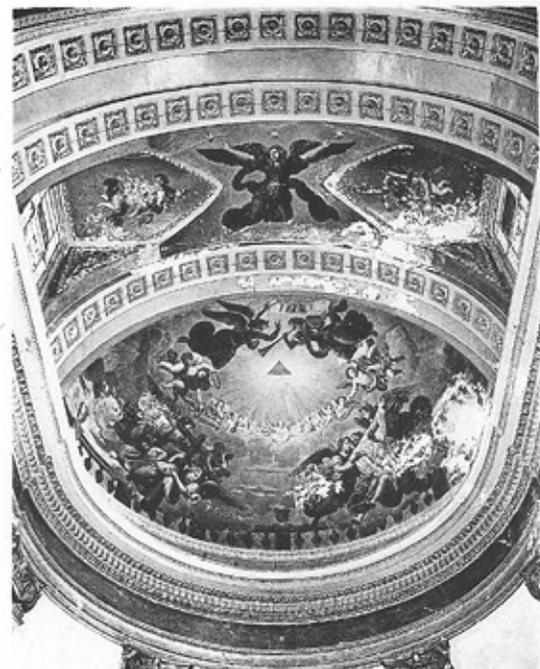


FIG. 11. Mexico City, Santa Teresa, Chapel of Christ, Apse: Cordero, Renovation of the Miraculous Crucifix

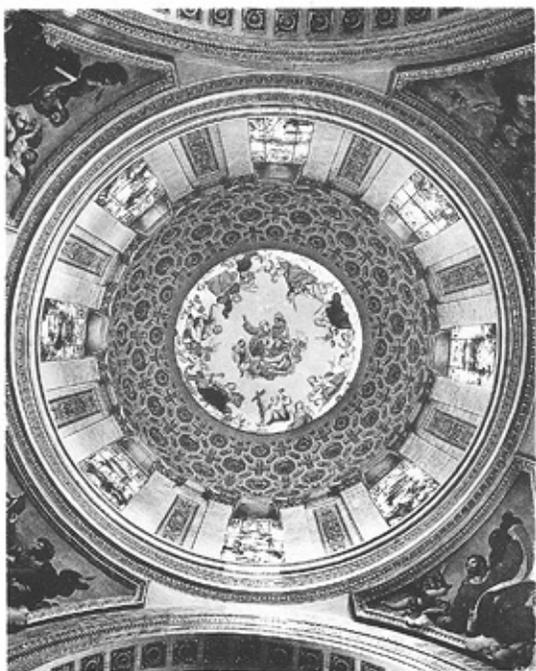


FIG. 12. Mexico City, Santa Teresa, Chapel of Christ, Dome and Pendentives: Cordero, God Surrounded by Cardinal and Theological Virtues, and Evangelists



FIG. 13. Hope, Faith, Charity and Justice, Detail of Fig. 12



FIG. 15. Mexico City, Santa Teresa, Chapel of Christ, Panel Flanking Central Window: Cordero, History

selves a racial conflict, and the half-Spanish Cordero solved his own by a delicate transmutation. In his first important picture, sent from Rome when he was twenty-six, he portrays himself, plumed and naked, among the Indian slaves that Columbus exhibits to their Catholic Majesties (Figs. 3-4).¹⁷

From the profits of his ambulant trade, this unusual

17. We know the features of Cordero at different ages through self-portraits, portraits, photographs, and a bust from nature by Tomas Pérez. Perhaps of less strict evidence, but valid, is the fact that his two still living daughters see in one of his fifteen grandsons, the sculptor Juan Lionardo Cordero, a striking resemblance to the artist.

Of Cordero in Rome there exists a self-portrait, dated 1847. Now in the collection of Sra. Maria Elena Cordero de Magaña, it was lithographed in 1851 for *La Ilustración Mexicana*, 1, p. 137. It shows him at twenty-three, wearing a small well-groomed moustache, slightly drooping, and a goatee. This was his aspect while painting the *Columbus*. A later portrait, painted by Miguel Mata after Cordero's return to Mexico, shows a bushier moustache and a full beard.

It is family knowledge that self-portraits were included both in the 1850 *Columbus*, and in the 1853 *Adultera*. The presumed portraits were pointed out to me, but both personages, one a Spanish knight and the other a Pharisee, wore the full beard found in the later Mata portrait. Also both were treated competently, but totally lacking in the subjective intensity rarely lacking in a self-portrait.

Keeping faith in the family tradition, but having lost confidence in the present identifications, I looked again at the *Adultera*. At the extreme left, on the very edge of the frame, is a head in lost profile, peeking in, rather than actually part of the picture. Self-effacing, dark against a lighter ground, it wears a small, drooping, well-groomed moustache that contrasts with the river-gods' beards of the Pharisees. Its beak nose and thin nostrils, its open mouth, are painted with a feathery, quivering stroke quite unlike the ponderous competence that marks the rest of the picture. I pointed it out to the family and we checked the features further against the profile of Juan Lionardo, of whom it could have been a portrait.

The Spanish knight, the alleged self-portrait in the *Columbus*, wears also the anachronistic full beard. Using the precedent of the *Adultera*, I looked instead for an unassuming posture and a lost profile, perhaps also silhouetted against the light. These characteristics correspond to the kneeling Indian captive. He has the small well-groomed moustache, the bony nose, and thin nostrils that were Cordero's, and that are scarcely Indian characteristics. Corollary evidence is the proximity to the subjectively intense dedication. Here also, despite the brown hue with which grandfather had chosen to dye himself, the family agreed to the truth of the new identification.

That both self-portraits are in profile is unusual, but not improbable, given the use of multiple mirrors.

Even in colonial times, the Mexican nation was symbolized by an Indian girl, either in genuine pre-Hispanic costume and hair-dress, or in the plumed skirt and headdress that have been attributed to American aborigines since the sixteenth century. In his 1801 engravings of episodes in the life of the Mexican martyr, San Felipe de Jesús, Montes de Oca represents Mexico as a pre-Columbian maiden kneeling, holding an obsidian sword. By mid-century, she is more often shown reclining in a hammock tied to palm trees.

A nationalistic connotation then allows even the white Mexican to think of himself as Indian. The modern school of painting has brought to a climax the triumph of Indianism, understood thus as a national badge.

peddler saved enough to pay his passage to Italy, and a government already kindly inclined toward artists met further expenses with the post of attaché to its Legation to the Holy See.¹⁸ The day before leaving, Cordero painted a portrait of his aged father that stands out in his work for boldness of impasto and of chiaroscuro. Tradition has it that he painted the picture in that single afternoon, at the request of the old man seized with a premonition that he might not live to see his son return. Perhaps it is only the intimate content, subjective tenseness, and haste of execution that suggest an infiltration of style from the mature Goya. Summing up his Mexican studies, the portrait nevertheless speaks well for his local teachers.¹⁹

In Rome, Cordero was not hampered in his cultural search by the paternal gesture of his government in making him in name a diplomat. If we are to believe the tradition related to this moment of his career, ". . . he dedicated fourteen hours daily to studies distributed between Drawing, Anatomy, Perspective, and the Rules of Composition and of History."²⁰ His teacher was Natal de Carta, or Natale Carta, known as a painter to me only through careful copies of his work that Cordero included in his shipments of pictures to Mexico. So competently thorough is the treatment of figures and costumes as to suggest Mengs as the master's master, together with a faint infusion of troubadour style.²¹

In Mexico City, on April 7, 1845, an unusually violent earthquake wrecked the dome of the Christ Chapel of Santa Teresa, the debris smashing the miraculous Crucifix to bits, and destroying the greater part of the temperas painted thirty-two years before by Ximeno y Planes. A contemporary lithograph gives an idea of the extent of the damage (Fig. 5). Started with pious enthusiasm, the work of reconstruction was to cost over 100,000 pesos and to last thirteen years.²²

18. Original *nomenclatura* in the collection of Juan Lionardo Cordero, Mexico City.

19. The picture is still in the family, in the collection Raz Guzmán, Mexico City. A Raz Guzmán married a daughter of Cordero. It is unsigned and undated, a fact that strengthens rather than weakens the attached family tradition.

20. Antonio García Cubas, *Diccionario geográfico, histórico y biográfico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, Mexico, 1888, article "Cordero." Quoted from Don Francisco Zarco, "D. Juan Cordero," *La Ilustración Mexicana*, 1, 1851, p. 138.

21. An Italian peasant girl in the collection of Sra. Dolores Vertiz, Vda. de Orvañanos, San Ángel, is probably the picture listed in the catalogue of the Academy show of 1850 as "38. Traje del pueblo de Neptuno en los estados pontificios. Una joven de mas de medio cuerpo, apoyada en una rosa (roca?) con fondo de mar. 56 x 42." Signed "Juan Cordero Copió." *La Mora*, on loan at the 1945 show, from the collection of Sra. Asunción Cordero de Sánchez, is stylistically and physically a companion piece to the first, and the signature is also followed by an indecisive but probable "Copió." Distinct from his other Italian works, I take these two pictures as a clue to the style of Cordero's master.

22. *Historia de la milagrosa Renovación* . . ., 1845, pp. 144-

Political independence had not yet severed the continuity of a colonial art tradition lavish in murals, and new ones were trusted to Juan Cordero for the restored building. Naturally, painting could not begin until the architecture was completed, and the young artist continued his studies in Rome for years, meanwhile working on the composition.

A sketchbook of minute format ($4\frac{3}{8}'' \times 3''$), dating from his Roman period, contains the expected scribbles, trip expenses, books to read — Thomas Moore and Lord Byron! — address of a model, resolve to stop smoking, comparative amounts received by other art students from their governments, top dogs being the Russians, "with no obligation, and when they do some copies, the same academy that pensions them buys their work."²³

Besides such jottings are sketches that range from juvenile charges, a man with a high hat and one with a beak nose, to copies of Carpaccio, Titian, Guido Reni, Carlo Dolci, and apparently Isabey. Current mural preoccupations drove Cordero to sketch the Pantocrator of Santa Pudenziana, to study ways of filling a lunette, and how Raphael contrived to suspend in space the cluster of volumes of his *Vision of Ezekiel*, paragon of the future domical decoration of the rebuilt Santa Teresa.

Between 1845 and 1850 may be dated the works of his second shipment to the Mexican Academy, among them two biblical subjects, *Moises en Raffidin*²⁴ and an *Anunciación*,²⁵ careful, polished compositions, nevertheless bathed in light and tender with a spirit of youth surprised at its own mastery. Dated 1847, the double portrait of his fellow-pensioners, Pérez and Valero, of two copper-hued young sculptors in gray workclothes, is more intimate, and strongly Mexican. The scumbled chords of terre-verte, English red, and raw sienna are toned low to match the

Indian skin, with the white of a collar and a cuff for spice (Fig. 6).²⁶ Placed side by side again at the Cordero show of 1945,²⁷ as they had been in 1850, the contrast between portraits and biblical themes justifies the thesis of Baron de Humboldt that both *Apollo Belvedere* and the Aztec *Coatlícué* are relevant to the formation of a Mexican artist.

In 1850, *Columbus before the Catholic Sovereigns*²⁸ was painted. It is as enamel-smooth as the biblical themes,

26. *Catálogo . . .*, 1850, "No. 37. Retratos de los dos escultores pensionados en Roma por esa Academia. 46 x 36." Collection Galería de Pintura de México.

The unfinished bust about which the models are grouped is probably the one mentioned in the catalogue of the 1851 show: "No. 36. D. Felipe Valero. Estatua de Jupiter, copia del original del Sr. Galli, romano."

27. For notices of the 1945 show at Palacio de Bellas Artes, see the newspaper and magazine articles published during and since the show. The list was given to me by Father José Antonio Cordero.

Daily newspapers: *El Nacional*, August 5 and 12, 1945; *El Universal*, July 20, 22, 26, 27, and August 5, 1945; *Novedades*, July 28, 1945; *Excelsior*, July 18, 20, 23, 26, 28, and September 12, 1945; *Últimas Noticias*, July 12 and 27, August 6, 23, 24, 25, and September 11, 1945; *El Universal Gráfico*, June 6 and July 25, 1945; *Prensa Gráfica*, August 8, 1945.

Magazines: *Norte*, no. 96; *Revista de Revistas*, August 12, 1945; *Nosotros*, August 11, and September 1, 1945; *Jueves de Excelsior*, August 23, 1945; *Estampa*, August 8, 1945; *La Nueva República*, August 1, 1945; *Así*, August 25, and September 1, 1945; *Hoy*, August 11, 1945 and June 1, 1946; *La Nación*, July 21, and August 4, 1945; *Intercambio*, August, 1945; *Tepeyac*, September, 1945; *Mañana*, May 11, 1946; *Universidad, órgano de la Universidad de Nuevo León*, no. 5. Of special interest are *Excelsior*, July 26, 1945, written by the artist's grandson, Juan Lionardo Cordero, and *Universidad*, by Salvador Toscano. Also my own articles, *El Nacional*, August 5, 1945, and *Hoy*, August 11, 1945.

During the show, two inscriptions by Diego Rivera framed the entrance door. They sum up today's reappraisal, "Cordero fué en el Siglo XIX la primera afirmación del muralismo laico, cívico, con sentido social. Su obra fué destruida por los 'científicos,' pero él queda como el precursor de la actual pintura mural mexicana."

"Cordero afirmó, dentro del clásico Greco-romano del México sometido y semi-colonial, el sentido profundo del clásico mexicano del México independiente que ahora empieza a renacer."

28. *Catálogo . . .*, January, 1851, "No. 25. De vuelta Colón del nuevo mundo que acababa de descubrir, presenta a los príncipes católicos Da. Isabel y Fernando, varios naturales de la nueva tierra y ricos regalos de los productos de aquel suelo. Sentados los reyes debajo de un rico dorsel, se levanta D. Fernando para honrar al afortunado marino, que acercándose a los soberanos, indica con una mano los presentes de la tierra descubierta: muchas damas de honor y caballeros están presentes a esta escena gloriosa para España. 76 x 108 pulgadas." Collection Galería de Pintura de México. The friction between Clavé and Cordero may be said to have started with the showing of this picture at the Academy. Zarco writes in *La Ilustración Mexicana*, I, 1851, p. 143, "Y á pesar de todo, no quisiéramos decirlo, pero debemos hacerlo, en México hubo empeño en ciertas gentes de ir á buscar lunares en el cuadro de Colón . . . y la censura que se hacía de Cordero, inspiraba compasión hácia los que se esforzaban en eclipsar su gloria porque era mexicano. . . . Y preciso es notar, que en la exposición no parece casual el lugar en que se han colocado las obras de Cordero. Parece que se les ha buscado la peor luz, que se ha tenido decidido empeño en que resalte ménos su mérito; y esto es innoble, es indigno, sobre todo de parte de un artista."

148 and facing p. 186. The lithograph is a rush work made just after the earthquake, that corresponds to today's news photographs. It complements an appendix, pp. 151-177, "Acta que contiene los principales sucesos ocurridos en la destrucción de la sagrada imagen de Cristo crucificado, conocida por el Señor de Santa Teresa."

23. Collection Sra. Asunción Cordero de Sánchez, Mexico City.

24. *Catálogo de los objetos de Bellas Artes de que consta la Segunda Exposición Anual de la Academia Nacional de San Carlos de México*, Mexico, Establecimiento Tipográfico de R. Rafael, Calle de Cadena no. 13, January 1850. "No. 36. Moises, Aaron y Ur en el monte Oreb. Moises, sentado en un peñasco, tiene alzadas al cielo las manos implorando la proteccion del altísimo, mientras sus ojos con espresión ansiosa se dirigen al llano bajo sus pies, donde los soldados de Israel pelean con sus enemigos. Aaron y Ur, con semblantes en los que se trasluce la esperanza y el temor, sostienen las manos del gran legislador. 52 x 61." Signed: "Juan Cordero. Inv. Roma, 1847." In the collection of Sr. Javier Villada Savifiñon, Mexico City.

25. *Catálogo . . .*, 1850, "No. 39. La salutación angélica. El angel en una nube se aparece a María que interrumpe su oración: con la mano izquierda le presenta la azucena y con la derecha acompaña la salutación. 27 x 21." Collection Galería de Pintura de México.

in light Naples yellows and velvet reds. More complex than that of previous works, the composition groups and lights many figures with the care of a stage director. Psychologically, the picture is important to prove that Cordero was not dazzled by Rome to the point of forgetting his far-away, war-seared, war-mutilated country. Besides the implications of his self-portrait among the group of Indian slaves,²⁹ there is an inscription modestly hidden under the edge of the palatial carpet fringe as if it were half-swept dust, "To the Academy of San Carlos of Mexico, this testimonial of gratitude. J. Cordero. Roma 1850" (Fig. 7).

This grateful caption means more to us in retrospect than the young artist could guess. His relation to the Academy was to fill a life-span with hopes and heart-breaks, and the pleasantness was soon to sour. He addressed his thanks to the school as he had known it, down-at-heel, easy-going, that managed to share its poverty with him, but that school did not exist any more. Well-meaning uplifters, with Don Bernardo Couto at their head, having raised enough money for the purpose, imported in 1846 a Catalan director, Don Pelegrin Clavé, who aptly described himself as ". . . having received an academic education, and now professor in an academy."³⁰ Clavé was a superb executive, a moral zealot, and a mediocre painter who never recovered from a trip taken in his youth to Germany. "How could I forget . . . the eminent and venerable Overbeck . . . first perhaps to start the reaction against the profanities of the Renaissance."³¹ Spared from his scorn were very few painters, namely, Kaulbach and Cornelius.³²

Here was a foreign director who, unlike his Spanish predecessors, could not be prodded to anger or lulled into

29. There is among the "muchas damas de honor" another portrait, that of Maria Bonani, an Italian girl with whom the painter was in love, which gives an even sharper edge to the racial allusion.

30. Couto, *Diálogo* . . . , 1872, pp. 89-90. The text, dating from 1860, was published posthumously, "Lo pública la viuda del autor." It purports to be a conversation between Couto as the enlightened amateur, Clavé as the professional painter, and the poet Pesado. That no changes were made in the text after the earlier date is obvious. For example, in the dialogue relating to mural painting, quoted later, mention is made of that of Ramon Sagredo, painted in 1857, but none of the work that Clavé himself began in 1861 in the Church of La Profesa. The latter work was not even foreseen at the date of the writing, as Clavé advances instead as a future possibility the painting of murals in what is now the library of the Academy, a work that was never carried out.

Though nowhere does Couto claim that the dialogue is a shorthand transcription of actual conversations, it appears to be a carefully and artificially ordered composite, each phrase remaining true to the character who delivers it. To round out a knowledge of Clavé, see his biography in Manuel G. Revilla, *Obras*, 1908, I, pp. 107-217.

31. Couto, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

32. Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

languor by the exotic milieu. "I did not find in Mexico any school [of art] either good or bad, and taught my disciples along the lines I had learned in Barcelona and Rome."³³ After a few years of happy-go-lucky loitering — that had nevertheless bred a Cordero — the National Academy bent its neck again under the Spanish yoke, as if it still were the Regal Academy.

Cordero returned to the *patria* in 1853, carting with him on a trip still hazardous a colossal canvas, *The Redeemer and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. He exhibited it in 1854 at the remodeled Academy, to show taxpayers what cultural profits accrued from the small sum they had invested in him.³⁴

To use the word in its original sense, the picture was a masterpiece, in that it proved that the student could now be considered a master. Cordero also practiced the equivalent of modern newspaper publicity, publishing a letter from Rome, dated July 10, 1853, written by Stefano Ciccolini to the "Ilustrísimo y Reverendísimo Señor D. Carlos Borgnana, canónigo de la Patriarcal Basílica Laterense, &," in the hope that foreign approval would influence national opinion.

Juan Cordero has recently painted an historical picture, twenty palms wide and fourteen high, and is leaving for Mexico, where it will be shown at the Academy so that his countrymen may judge of the ability, and scope, and good orientation of the studies that have raised him high in the most noble art of painting. . . . Good are the fruits he has reaped, for those familiar with the sight of what is good and beautiful say that the manner in which the work has been imagined shows very good sense as concerns subject matter, and that the figures are egregiously disposed, and learnedly bolstered by what art can and should contribute to beautify it all:

33. Couto, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

34. Exhibited at the Academy show of 1854, not in the exhibition galleries, but by itself in the permanent gallery. *Catálogo* . . . , 1854, p. 36, "En la galería de pintura de esta Academia está el cuadro original de D. Juan Cordero, artista mexicano que ha sido pensionado de este establecimiento en Roma, y ha vuelto después de completar allí su educación artística: el cuadro representa a la mujer acusada de adulterio por los fariseos ante Jesu Cristo.

"En primer termino el Salvador con apacible y majestuoso semblante señala los misteriosos caracteres que ha escrito en la tierra, los circunstantes todos espresan el efecto que en ellos ha producido lo escrito por el Sr.; la acusada, con un semblante humilde e interesante, manifiesta su arrepentimiento; de los acusadores unos tratan con empeño de descifrar al misterioso letrado, y otros abandonan el lugar de la escena, porque han sido confundidos por el que penetra los intimos secretos del corazón. Vease al fondo las grandiosas escaleras del templo, en cuyo vestibulo está pasando la escena. 4 varas x 5 varas 18 p." Collection Cordero family.

Related to the picture is a canvas in the collection Raz Guzmán, with studies of the head of Jesus and that of the woman, actual size, with the plain canvas for background. In the same collection is an elaborate black and white replica, a wash drawing with variants, probably prepared as model for a commercial engraving. In the small Italian sketchbook are two jottings of the Pharisee who bends over the Hebrew characters, one bearded, and the other beardless as in the final version.

perspective, sentiments, costumes, colors, lights, shadows, with a perfection in everything that leaves nothing to desire. . . .³⁵

The return of Cordero scarcely pleased Clavé, who could hardly dismiss the picture in as cavalier a fashion as he had on arrival the whole Mexican school. The hardest critical task is to recapture, once the trail has long since cooled, those heated convictions that made contemporaries clash, now when all are bedfellows, berthed within the style of a given period. Both Cordero and Clavé were partisans of *peinture d'histoire*, both told their noble stories through the same dignified puppets — bearded, antique-draped ancients.³⁶ Stylistic differences are today so slight and the correspondence so close that the passions raised by *The Redeemer and the Woman Taken in Adultery* suggest an organized political opposition, Clavé-inspired, rather than a genuine aesthetic passion. Clavé, however, doubtless resented the sensuous coloring, the relative impetuosity in the execution, that distinguished Cordero from the puritan Overbeck.

La Ilustración Mexicana consoled Juan Cordero by saying of his masterpiece that “. . . as to all works of genius, nothing has been lacking to authenticate its merit, not even the venomous darts of envy. Given that the fame of one of our compatriots is in the balance, the best possible answer to all classes of invectives is the estimate of Steffano Ciccolini. . . .”³⁷

Now an object of scandal and admiration, Cordero could not be overlooked by the ruling powers. The next best thing was to absorb him within the official salaried world. He was offered the sub-direction of the Academy. Cordero refused the post and salary of 1,000 pesos in a letter where Mexicanism runs high, “I must confess that I did not sacrifice the best years of my life in foreign countries, nor did I receive favors from the Academy, to come back to my own *patria* to serve under Señor Pelegrin Clavé.”³⁸ One must note the refreshingly chauvinistic mention of Europe as “other countries” at a time when enlightened Mexicans spent both efforts and money to put a European at the head of the school, unmindful of the implied slight to Mexican artists. Also notable is Cordero’s continued devotion to the Academy he had known, that impedes him from pledging his loyalty to what everyone believed to be a much-improved Academy.

35. “El Redentor y La Mujer Adultera. Cuadro del Pintor Mexicano Don Juan Cordero,” *La Ilustración Mexicana*, IV, 1854, pp. 5-10.

36. The similarities are limited to those between biblical pictures that Cordero painted in his early period and the whole biblical output of Clavé and Clavé’s students. Pictures like the Roman portrait of Pérez and Valero are far beyond the scope of Clavé in sheer beauty of paint. Cordero’s mural boldness remains unmatched.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Revilla, *Obras* . . . , p. 260.

Cordero had refused the sub-directorship with the hope of replacing Clavé, whose contract expired at the end of 1855.³⁹ The man who could get him the job was the current dictator, His Excellency General Antonio López de Santa-Anna.⁴⁰ The best way for a painter to invade the intimacy of the great was to paint their portraits. Rubens had already blended the portraiture of influential personages with diplomatic pursuits *sous le manteau*, and Cordero did the same. Both the ageing Dictator and his young second wife, Señora Dolores Tosta de Santa-Anna, posed for him.

These easel pictures are the first to announce Cordero’s ample mural style. They are the least constricted of official portraits, done with the freedom and intimate delight with which a still-life can be approached. Unlike the careful, respectable biblical machines, the portraits are of a blunt mastery that matches that of a sign painter, of a gross taste that proposes a Mexican aesthetic poles apart from the Germanizing one of Clavé. The General strides a fiery stallion impassively, his uniform blending with saddle and trappings in a glow of blue, red, and gold, his single leg spurred and booted. Chapultepec Castle looms in the background, and gaudily attired hussars gallop and drill on the lawn below.⁴¹

Given to her by the gallant General on her birthday, the portrait of Dolores represents her standing in a room of the Presidential Palace, beside a view of the Cathedral towers, which act as a gray foil. Her resplendent white Sunday best is strewn with loops of pearls braided among bouquets of laurel leaves, in allusion to beauty wed to glory. Long suede gloves, an ostrich fan, and *retroussis* of gold brocade complete the regal ensemble (Fig. 8).⁴²

Santa-Anna’s sturdy taste was as one with that of his lady in matters of fashion, and that of his painter in matters aesthetic. As expected, the Dictator commanded that, at the end of Clavé’s second term the following year, Cordero should become Director of the Academy.⁴³ Bernardo Couto was head trustee of the institution, the same man

39. Besides the patriotic motive, level-headed people could point to the difference in salaries. The director received 3,000 pesos annually.

40. Once a national hero and self-proclaimed Perpetual Dictator, Santa-Anna was soon held responsible for the dismemberment of the Republic after the American war, and remains to this date a *bête noire* of Mexican history. In 1945, though the location of his portrait by Cordero was known, it was considered politically prudent to refrain from including it in the government-sponsored show.

41. Collection Sra. Aurelia Busto, Mexico City.

42. By modern standards, the best Cordero easel picture, together with the portrait of his father already described. Collection Sr. Rafael Manzo, Mexico City.

43. Clavé’s first three contracts were for four years each, 1846-50, 1851-55, and the term that Cordero meant to fill, 1856-60. I doubt if regular contracts were signed in the troubled years of the Empire and the Reform. When Clavé returned to Eu-

who had worked hard to bring Clavé from overseas, and his personal judgment was on trial. As happens in fact, where paradox is as plentiful as reason, we find Couto, a well-informed art amateur, on the side of the mediocre Clavé, while General Santa-Anna, moved by a mere instinct of military bluntness, champions the greater Cordero.

As a further paradox, Couto showed such civic courage as to oppose the wish of the Dictator, alleging the ancient *fueros* or exemptions that protected the autonomy of the school. Santa-Anna did not doubt his own power, but must have doubted his own taste, and bowed to the opinion of the cultured Couto, thus postponing by decades the coming of the Mexican school of art into its own. This failure, which was a failure in worldly opinion, forced Cordero forever out of a bureaucratic, horizontal plenty into a path of hard work and great achievements.

His first mural, *Jesus among the Doctors*, a large lunette in the Church of Jesús María, is a transition work of a technique still close to that of easel painting. Though difficult to approach nowadays, high up on a dark wall, in a church transformed into a storage hall for the national military archives, it appears to be painted in desiccated oil (Fig. 9).⁴⁴ Its personages also bring to mind the *Woman Taken in Adultery*: the young Jesus is encircled by the same Pharisees, with soupy beards and zinc drapes. But the sheen laboriously sought for in the easel picture is replaced in the mural by isolated areas of local color, deep green, loud violet, metallic blue, minium red, saffron, all condensed chroma intensities that contrast with the diluted tints reserved for the drapes of the Holy Child. The geometrical construction is defined by the horizontals and verticals of a severe architecture that is but the pretext for a mathematical partitioning of the plane. The effect is of color stencils superimposed upon a geometrical diagram. The subject dated at least from Italian days. The sketchbook already referred to contains a scribble for a *Christ among the Doctors*, composed however in an upright rectangle instead of the final half-circle.

A job long in the making was that of the Chapel of Christ of the Church of Santa Teresa, commissioned in 1845. By 1855, the building had been restored, the giant

rope in 1868, he left his job safely in the hands of his students, Rebull and Pina.

44. The photograph fails to give a true idea of size. The consciously simple treatment, the heroic scale, and very heavy frame make the picture appear smaller than its actual size. It was photographed with flash bulb at a distance, from the only spot where the piles of archives permitted a centered stand. The electric cord that hangs midway through the picture makes clear the geometric care of Cordero, who bases this picture on an empty center, suggested perhaps by the *School of Athens* stanza of Raphael.

Desiccated oil is the medium implied by the mat, dry surface, but this may also be due to an application of mat varnish.

dome was raised again on its high ring of stone, and Cordero started work.

Santa Teresa is definitely mural in technique and in conception. Jesús María was a single wall, its problems confined to the harmonic division of a flat area, differing from the average easel picture only in that it was a half-circle. Santa Teresa offered, instead, complex spatial relationships between the hemisphere of the central dome, the quarter sphere of the absidal half-dome, the spherical segments of the pendentives, and the vaulted arches and vertical walls. The artist understood and solved this purely mural problem by increasing the figure scale and chroma intensity in the ratio that the point of view recedes, in an effort to equalize optical areas seen from widely differing ranges and under diverse light conditions. Though scattered all over the nave, the subject matter is one, as is the architecture. For example, the zenithal God trespasses the limits of the dome to bless the labors of the Evangelists that dwell in the four pendentives.

Unlike that of Jesús María, the decoration is painted directly on the wall in a tempera that resembles the glue tempera, or distemper, of stage painters, but has lasted well under trying conditions.⁴⁵ Although they were mutilated by revolutions and whitewashed in part after the secularization of the chapel, a description of 1857 records the total scheme:

The paintings are in the shell, or top part of the niche made to receive the altarpiece, representing an episode of the miraculous renovation of the Lord; in the cupola, where God the Father is surrounded by Virtues; in three of the pendentives, where appear the Evangelists Saint John, Saint Luke, and Saint Mark. At the sides of the central windows are four allegorical figures, Astronomy, History, Poetry and Music. In the spaces between pilasters are seen the four Apostles, Peter, Paul, James the Major and James the Minor. In the panels and vault of the choir are seven allegories of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; over the door of the sacristy is the *Purification in the Temple*, and facing it at the same height, the *Birth of the Most Holy Virgin*. Furthermore, centered over the two main lateral altars are two large oil paintings, copies of the *Transfiguration of Our Lord*, by Raphael, and of the *Assumption*, by Titian.⁴⁶

45. Though far from factual, we quote what López López wrote concerning the technique of Santa Teresa, May 11, 1858, as quoted in Antonio Maria de Padua, *La Madre de Dios en México*, Mexico, J. Balleca y compañía, 4 Amor de Dios, 1882, Ch. VI: "Because of our ignorance, we felt unqualified to state if the works considered were in oil, in fresco, or in tempera. They show the body and vigor associated with oil, as do the effect and impasto, and the light veiling. But their opacity shows that they are not in oil. Neither do they seem painted in fresco or tempera. . . . No doubt, Sr. Cordero uses a special method that has the advantages of oil as concerns handling, and in effect the opacity of tempera. Maybe this rare method presents other difficulties, requires perhaps quickness, security, and conclusiveness. We should keep in mind what difficulties were attendant upon the work, and against which the artist has fought with great heroism. . . ."

46. *La Cruz*, v, 12, p. 404. That the work was begun years before is suggested by a mention in the catalogue of the Academy

Of the 100,000 pesos spent for the reconstruction of the chapel, 11,500, or over ten per cent, was originally earmarked for murals. The only other expense for decoration that exceeds painting is that of the elaborate neo-classic marble altarpiece, made to receive the miraculous Crucifix, and imported from Italy.⁴⁷

A lithograph records the decoration in its original state (Fig. 10). Since then, the murals of the apse have darkened with decades of candle smoke and have partly peeled off (Fig. 11). The Apostles, the *Birth of the Virgin* and the *Presentation at the Temple* are whitewashed.⁴⁸ The two oils have disappeared, apparently at the time that Zapatista troops occupied the city. The upper half of the *Assumption* was found by the grandson of the artist, Father José Antonio Cordero, in a private collection in San Ángel.⁴⁹ The fragment is badly preserved, and shows parallel creases that prove that it was kept for a while rolled and under a weight, probably in some hiding place.

The dome is intact, except for the central scar left by the removal of a chandelier (Figs. 12-13).⁵⁰ Raised on a show of 1852, where Cordero himself did not exhibit, "No. 84. D. Manuel Brito. Un angel con los tres clavos del Sr. Copia de Cordero." The subject is the same as that of one of the "seven allegories of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ," in the choir of Santa Teresa.

47. Of interest is the complete list of decorative expenses quoted by *La Cruz*, pp. 401-402, naming the artists who collaborated with Cordero on the ensemble:

2,590 pesos	Escultura ornamental
9,117	Dorado y estuco, por el artista mexicano D. José Álvarez
13,700	El templete de marmol, confiado a los Sres. Tangassi
11,500	Pinturas, encargadas al artista mexicano D. Juan Cordero
415	Vitriceras de ventanas, por D. Miguel Terrazas
200	Reposicion de cuatro angeles de madera, que son obra del celebre escultor mexicano Patiño.

48. I take the two latter to have been mural panels. But they may have been easel pictures. López López' description is ambiguous: "Right and left of the threshold are two original paintings, the one the *Birth of the Virgin*, and the other the *Presentation of the Savior at the Temple*. Though they are close to the spectator who enters the sanctuary, it seems that their author wished to give them the character of sketches, not to distract from the main object. Because of their place, they are treated as accessories of such minor importance that not even a frame has been added as yet." *La Madre de Dios* . . . , Ch. VI.

The mention of a frame does not imply that they are easel pictures, as each of the mural panels is limited by a frame-like molding. If easel paintings on canvas, they would be more probably painted in oil, and no mention is made of such a departure.

49. Of the copy of Raphael on the facing wall, there is in existence a smaller, earlier version that Cordero brought with him from Italy, and that was exhibited at the Academy show of 1854, together with *La Adultera*. Catalogue reference, "No. 1. Copia del celebre cuadro de Rafael que representa la Transfiguración del Señor. D.V. 59 x 39 p."

Though a catalogue note informs us that D.V. means *De Venta*, there was no sale. The picture is still in the possession of the family, collection Raz Guzmán.

50. The chandelier was put up long after the mural was com-

ring of stone deeply coffered in a pattern reminiscent of that of the Roman Pantheon, the painted hemisphere acquires in illusion more robustness than its huge frame. From its zenith, God the Father appears, swaddled in Mars violet drapes, silhouetted against a dazzling egg-yellow dawn. One can only with difficulty credit the delicate *Vision of Ezekiel* for being its first inspiration. A coarse vigor animates God, weight makes His levitation dubious, and the Hand blessing seems equally ready to cushion an expected fall.

Seated around the ledge of the circumference as if upon the mouth of a well, Cardinal and Theological Virtues appear as giantesses transformed by the steep ceiling perspective and the epic strength of the brush into heaps of granite-hard draperies. They cradle in their fleshy arms holy attributes: an anchor, a cross, a palm, and other accessories carpentered for just such a celestial opera. The unflagging chromas and contrasts reserved by the painter for this higher level, failing to smooth into the projected unity with distance, daze even an eye keyed to Van Gogh.⁵¹

The pendentives are milder, more cautiously brushed, and yet the painted volume of the drapes still holds its own beside clouds gessoed in true relief. Foreshortenings intended to suggest height disclose footsoles in striking reminiscence of the ghostly footprints that trod the trails painted in pre-Hispanic codices (Fig. 14).⁵²

Mildest of all and closest to a museum palette are the triangular panels that flank the central lateral windows, Raphaelesque, but replacing the optical illusions that make air circulate in the *Parnassus*, by iron-cast sculpturesque definitions (Fig. 15).

Tempera is a heroic medium, inasmuch as values and colors change in drying as they do in fresco, and Cordero banked perhaps too much on dim light and long optical range to melt certain discordant tones into harmony. This brusqueness, bracing to the modern eye, must have seemed hardly bearable to most contemporaries, all the more when the decoration was in its pristine strength. A writer of 1857 remarked with pious reserve, "if we may speak quite frankly, the paintings in fresco [*sic*] failed to please a majority among intelligent persons, either as to composition,

pleted. Says Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 186, "El actual capellán de Santa Teresa mando suspender de la cupula una cuerda para lámpara que arranca del torso del Padre Eterno y que afea, corta y divide toda la decoración, y a causado desperfectos a la pintura." Probably ca. 1915, when the oil paintings were removed, the chandelier disappeared. In its place there remains the ugly scar that disembowels the figure of God the Father.

51. López López, as a friend of Cordero, has an ingenious explanation for the unusual vividness, "The Glory is painted to be seen at one glance, for who could stay a long time with head lifted up to the zenith. In consequence, all is decisive and frank, all is brilliant and meant for a violent effect as is needed for a rapid impression, soul-photographic, if I may be permitted the term." *Animo-fotográfica* is indeed a daring term to be coined in 1857.

52. Remark made by Diego Rivera in his lecture on Cordero.

or drawing, or color, especially those of the cupola and the quarter dome. The three Evangelists seem harsh in extreme, as are also the four Apostles. . . ."⁵³

The reference to three Evangelists when four dwell in the four pendentives is not an error. Of the four Evangelists, one is the original Saint Matthew painted in 1813 by Ximeno y Planes, with a minor mystery attached to its preservation (Fig. 16). The drawing lithographed in 1847, directly after the earthquake, illustrates the pendentives in place, with the corresponding panels by Ximeno y Planes seemingly untouched by debris.⁵⁴ The accompanying text explains, "That day, at three fifty P.M. a very intense earthquake brought down the dome, leaving only its base and pedestal, sparing the enframing arches and their pendentives, whose good pictures remain intact. . . ."⁵⁵

It appears that, when Cordero started painting in the reconstructed building, only one of the Ximeno Evangelists remained. According to *El Diario de Avisos*, in an article published while the decoration was in course, ". . . the fourth figure is that of Saint Matthew. When the terrible accident of the destruction of the cupola occurred, it seems that in its fall it wished to respect this sacred Evangelist, and Cordero has decided to preserve the only one that remained intact."⁵⁶ *La Cruz* quotes the passage and comments somewhat heatedly:

For many years intelligent people have known that the figure of Saint Matthew was quite defective because of the position of one of its legs, and one is led to believe that Sr. Cordero, when he respected said figure, thought that the spectators would use its shortcomings as the basis for a comparison favorable to the new paintings. . . . When we keep in mind that after the destruction, the four frescoes of the pendentives remained in good state, we have to do ourselves violence indeed to attribute to an accident the preservation of the only defective figure. Nevertheless, this one shows by its color intonation a perfect grasp on the part of the artist of the effect that works of this type should produce, and we are even prone to believe that, from this point of view, the comparison is unfavorable to the new Evangelists.⁵⁷

Moved by the cold critical reception of the work the sponsors, disregarding the terms or the contract, paid the artist only 8,000 pesos, or 3,500 less than the agreed price.⁵⁸

53. *La Cruz*, v, 12, p. 404.

54. The lithograph shows two of the pendentives completely, and enough of a third to suggest that it is also intact. We know that the fourth, not visible in the print, was spared, as it is the Saint Matthew that is still in place. See note 22.

55. *Historia de la Milagrosa Renovación* . . ., 1845, pp. 152-153.

56. April 8, 1857. I quote from the passage reprinted in *La Cruz*, v, 12, because this copy of *El Diario de Avisos* is missing from the files of the National Hemeroteca of Mexico.

57. *La Cruz*, v, 12, pp. 404-405.

58. Payment mentioned in Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

We may believe that Cordero was not approached to do the next mural, that of the Church of San Fernando, but that he asked for the job, eager to justify himself, or else for no other reason but that he was a born muralist. We know that the work was done without pay, and there is ground to believe that the artist even had to pay for the colors he used.⁵⁹

The circumstances were strangely parallel to those that resulted in the decoration of Santa Teresa. The earthquake of June 19, 1858, badly wrecked San Fernando, opening wall cracks from dome to floor. Repairs costing up to 80,000 pesos were begun. This time, Cordero's patrons were the Barefoot Franciscans of the Reformed Observance. At the time, the church was midway between city and country. The convent grounds included gardens and orchards, and a famed cemetery. Burials were romantically solemn, the whole community sallying forth from church to grave, with flaming torches wavering in the wind.⁶⁰

Only the cupola and its four pendentives are the work of Cordero. The remaining matching decorations were painted by Don Santiago Villanueva, then famous for his perspective illusions.⁶¹ One feels here that boldness has been replaced by caution, that the artist does not only follow his inspiration, but makes a bid for popularity. The dome of San Fernando is an attempted *mea culpa* for the originality of that of Santa Teresa (Figs. 17-18).

The *Immaculate Conception*, oyster gray in a dark blue mantle, ascends a heaven of changing hues, ranging from golden ocher to flesh shade, to a kind of blueing blue. A dance of small cherubs in green, red, and purple scarves rings the shaft of the lantern, a motif already essayed in the dome of the Cathedral by Ximeno y Planes. Adolescent angelical musicians fill the dome, plucking harps, blowing trumpets, and playing cellos, while other spirits raise banners and display mottoes on streamers. Fortu-

59. *Ibid.*, p. 272, on the lack of payment. That Cordero paid for colors from his own pocket is implied by the fact that he used very cheap ones. This does not mean that it was unsound practice, or that he did not give consciously the preference to colors made in his own country.

60. Manuel Rivera Cambas, *México pintoresco, artístico y monumental*, Mexico, 1880, I, p. 376.

Such a burial, lithographed three years before Cordero started painting, is illustrated in *La Cruz*, III, facing p. 531.

61. Besides the mention in *Diario de Avisos*, July 18, 1860, there is a reference to Villanueva in López López, in his *Juicio Crítico* quoted later, that gives an idea of the forte of this painter. Speaking of perspective defects in a make-believe piece of architecture painted by Clavé, López López remarks, "The artist could have neutralized this effect by lowering substantially the capitals of the two columns seen in third and last plane, by [increasing] the obliqueness of the lateral cornices, showing more of the inside plane of the temple ceiling. This would straighten the prism, correct the perspective, and complete the illusion. To paint this little temple, it would have been wise to invite the famous Mexican artist Don Santiago Villanueva."

nately, Cordero could meet the taste of his period in regard to color without appreciably lowering his blatant taste, for it was the time when solferinos and magentas became fashionable. The tunics of the heavenly musicians and courtiers are either painted all of a piece from a single pot of paint, or display theatrical sheens: a leaf green warms up to salmon pink, a magenta turns baby-blue. A temperamental bluntness adds strident notes of its own. Among well-behaved drapes, one angular vermilion scarf resembles cast iron. Harps and cellos approximate the weight of the accessories painted in Santa Teresa, solid enough to give a sense of unease when in suspension at such a height.

Another factor besides that of public justification plays a rôle in the making of this mural. It is one that helps explain the striking change of mood between the virile strength found in Santa Teresa and the feminine grace that pervades San Fernando: Señorita Angela Osio, who became in 1860 Mrs. Juan Cordero, lived in the neighborhood of the church, and courtship and mural painting proceeded simultaneously.

The Señorita was no longer young by the standards of a time when girls married at thirteen, and took their dolls with them to the nuptial couch. She was all of twenty-four years old, just emerging from an unhappy love affair that ended when her widowed mother won over the daughter's beau in marriage.⁶² This, and for Cordero the lull that comes as the aftermath of an indecisive love affair, brought them together. The comparative mildness of San Fernando's aesthetic may be a gallant gesture to meet Doña Angela's spinsterish taste.

The painter reaped the public applause he had sought. It became fashionable to go see the Cordero mural as an alternative to a picnic, a concert, or a dance. *El Diario de Avisos* has preserved a conversation on the topic by young men about town, spattered with a wealth of exclamation signs, and larded with English, French, and Italian expressions that add slickness to the simplest statement:⁶³

The afternoon was beautiful, clear our conscience. . . . The soul made ready to savor the distractions that work well done deserves.

— To Tacubaya — To San Cosme! — To the Tivoli gardens!⁶⁴

62. A well-documented family tradition. Angela Osio lived at the time at 10 Calle de Guerrero, in front of the church. Cordero painted her portrait, signed and dated in that same year, 1860; now in the collection Raz Guzmán. The versatile gallant whom her mother married was the musician Bruno Flores.

63. "Variedades: El Convento de San Fernando y las pinturas de un artista mexicano," *El Diario de Avisos*, July 13, 14, 18 and 19, 1860. I keep the foreign words italicized, including English ones, as used in the original Spanish text.

64. To understand what the other attractions were that competed with Cordero's work, let us remember that "in the tivolis, the fare lists such rare names as *purée aux moutons*. . . . Fashion makes of the tivolis well attended places. . . . There rendezvous

— No, my lads: No! To San Fernando! said a certain *dandy*, a certain sympathetic *fashionable*, whose *brave garçon* manner and good breeding stamped him as the leader of our little chapel.

— To San Fernando!! And what for? To some burial? — Thanks, I am against funeral *meetings*. . . .

— Nothing like that for sure.

— Agreed then, and to San Fernando. . . .

Once inside the severe temple, our friend said, "Gaze at this dome and pendentives, and say sincerely if . . . the beautiful inspiration of famed Cordero cannot afford delights for a whole afternoon."

For a while we kept our heads raised; we remained a long while in suspense, impressed by the splendid decoration.

— This is good enough to delight an expert — said a fellow, shortsighted for sure — . . . However it pleases me, as I find in it I know not what that is surprising and celestial.

— It must be because of the many little angels, my lad, or because you look at a sky and clouds.

— No, rather because it is a job well done. . . . I find this figure somewhat clumsy, [however] I know that such figures are as a rule colossal in scale to produce a properly natural effect at the distance from which they are seen. . . . *Dis donc mon cher*, what is over the Saint Bonaventure, that I just perceive, without knowing what it is?

— Those are four *cantatrice* most beautiful.

— . . . What rained on those singing figures, and why are they so washed out?

— Rather than rain, it seems that Cordero wished to vary the tonality in this group, either for perspective effect, or because he has been accused of harshness. . . .

— Well, then, I am for harshness. . . . It seems to me that courage is needed to solve problems in this style, for there is no place left to waver about what it is that one sought to express —. This method is doubtless connected with a type of nerve and of energy that is both incisive and aggressive. . . . *Canario!* To be harsh one needs good anatomical knowledge, for nothing remains hidden of the work. . . .

On all parts, one heard praises and admiring exclamations, for other spectators had joined us. . . . Suddenly they all stopped talking. . . . Their silence coincided with the arrival of a certain artist, of open manner, with a beard thick, long and spectacular, a man . . . respected, more than for his grave demeanor, for his intelligence and judicious application.⁶⁵

The well-known artist was immediately surrounded and interpellated, and eagerly heard. The expert master weighed with ease and reason the select composition of Sr. Cordero, his drawing frank and to the point, his spontaneous handling,

take place, novelesque adventures with for protagonist a lady whose features are veiled; there is the indispensable place for the repasts of the wealthy. . . . None equals the Tivoli of San Cosme for agreeable sojourn, well groomed arbors, and the beautiful aspect of the dining places." Rivera Cambas, *México pintoresco* . . ., I, p. 340.

65. This unnamed expert, an open admirer of Cordero, may be the painter Miguel Mata. While teaching at the Academy, he headed the opposition to the director's policies. He published in *La Revolución*, October 30, 1855, an article that taunted Clavé: "Diez años hace que vinieron esos señores y que artistas nos presentan? Se dira como se ha dicho, que es termino muy corto para formarse un artista? Y a tardado mas para formarse el Sr. Cordero?" Quoted by Revilla, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

the harmonious color, the reasoned chiaroscuro, the glorious interpretation, the good show of drapes, the freshness of flesh-tones, the variety of intonations, and how the groups wove into each other, and the luminosity of the whole.

After a short silence, one of the late comers exclaimed, with transport half artistic and half religious:— How magnificent this oil of Sr. Cordero! . . .

Our artist turned his head with distaste, as if he had been bitten, but seeing from whence came the stone, politely answered a candid oldster;— I know what you mean, but let me caution you: The work you admire is not an oil.

— What ho! And where then may be the merit you speak of? And what will foreigners think if they find out that it is not an oil? And how could the community agree that such a work to be done otherwise than in oil? . . .⁶⁶

— To paint in oils, my dear sir, is to paint with oil, and the material used in painting does not affect correction and beauty, but durability. This is known to foreigners, and they will not disdain the work because it is not an oil. . . .

— As you say, if not for quality, then at least for permanency, it should have been done in oil. . . .

— This type of decoration is better done in tempera or in fresco for a number of reasons. First because of size. Second as regards handling and economy. Third, for lack of gloss and a better appearance. Painting it in oil means that the preparation would be hazardous and unequal, slow, difficult and expensive in execution, the effect heavy in parts, null in others because of the shine, and in the end less permanent because the paint would peel more easily when attacked by intemperateness. . . .

Asked another — Where did Cordero paint this magnificent Gloria?

— How where, answered the amazed artist. . . . Of course in the cupola itself.

— Oh no, sir, this cannot be, for besides the difficulties inherent to the concavity of the site, what fascination would not result from the abyss gaping at one's feet! Insecurity would impede the calm and tranquility of soul needed, would kill in the doer all inspiration and ability. I believe this decoration was done on canvas, and put on the dome with a minimum of inconvenience, once painted.

— You have properly hit on the obstacles that plague paintings of this kind, but they are not insuperable . . . and the artist need not become an upholsterer. I may be wrong — added the intelligent painter — but a work done that way, rather than delightful, would be ruined before its unveiling, for how could it be made to adhere to the curvature of a cupola? . . . There is also another inconvenience. The calculations that enter in the composition include the vanishing effect from certain visual points, to be corrected by means of a certain diagram based on what allowance is to be made for not drawing on a flat surface. You may rest assured that, in more than one figure, Cordero did away with the rules of good drawing to obtain a correct effect once the work be seen in perspective. . . .

66. The same remark was made when modern Mexican muralists started painting in fresco. So real was the concern over what foreigners would think that, to allay these fears, a group of non-Mexican residents printed and posted in 1924 an open letter to public Mexican opinion that praised the murals and affirmed their international worth. This gesture helped save the early frescoes of

Our *cicerone* praised high . . . the originality of expression and firmness of coloring.

Hearing color mentioned, someone said it did not merit praise, given that Sr. Cordero had been to Europe and returned with exquisite colors from Paris, most lovely, most brilliant, and above all most expensive. Otherwise, how could a Mexican artist emerge so well from the test.

Our appreciable instructor lost here some of his equanimity, and answered: Dear Sir, beauty and suavity of coloring do not depend on little tints as do toilet preparations, but in *la fuerza del mango*, the strength used in handling the brush. Murillo did marvels with mud . . . and the secret is *el mango*, not gamboge and patchouli. . . . There is and there has been no lack of Mexicans who did good work without using for crutches little colors from overseas. There are many pictures of the Mexican school that are of very good color. Cordero himself, even though he keeps in his studio a collection of fine colors, uses in works of this category only common pigments, such as one may find in any corner hardware store, wrapped in newspaper, at six cents a bagful . . .!⁶⁷

Cordero's repeated accomplishments and the success that greeted his latest mural grated upon the sufficiency of his foe, Clavé. The Director of the Academy was not a steady worker, being more of an executive than an artist. Already in 1850, when he was renewing his first five-year contract, a needed prod had been given his artistic creativeness by his friends. A clause had been added that specified he was to paint two original compositions in the course of the next five years. He painted one, exhibited at the Academy show of 1856. The *Early Youth of Isabella la Católica at the Side of Her Sick Mother* was received with relief by his supporters.⁶⁸ But it still remained to answer Cordero on his chosen ground, mural painting. Clavé began that year a duel by proxy; the galleries of the school were being remodeled and the best room was reserved for the works of his favorite students, "The School of Clavé." Rich moldings of gold and chocolate brown were made richer by "murals," a series of medallions commissioned to a favorite, Ramon Sagredo, representing the heads of famous artists silhouetted against a gold ground. They were copied from details of the hemicycle in the Ecole des

Orozco and Siqueiros at a time when there was official talk of whitewashing them.

67. ". . . que se compran en cualquier tlapalería, en cartuchos de a medio el manojo." *Tlapalería* is an exclusively Mexican term, made from *tlapale*, Náhuatl for pigment, and the Spanish suffix *ería*. It is a combination hardware and color store. *Cartuchos* are folded paper wrappings, such as are used for medicinal powders, and *manojo*, a bundle of these. A *medio* was worth six Mexican cents.

68. *Catálogo* . . ., 1855, "Estudio del Director de Pintura, Don Pelegrin Clavé. La primera juventud de Isabel la Católica al lado de su enferma madre.

". . . La reina madre en un sillón de alto respaldo, en que están bordadas las armas de Castilla, sufre uno de los ataques de enagenación mental, que a menudo la aquejaban, con el rostro lívido y la mirada fija en el suelo, como si viera levantarse algún objeto aterrador, que señala con la mano derecha. . . ."

Beaux-Arts, by Paul Delaroche.⁶⁹ A mural was also planned for the library, but never realized.

Bernardo Couto, the same who had successfully fought Cordero's nomination to the directorship, wrote in 1860 a basic *Dialogue on the History of Painting in Mexico*. Despite the apparent equanimity of style, the human thirst for self-justification results in a gross underestimate of Cordero's value that tinges, or rather dyes, later appraisals, for example that of Revilla.

We detect partisanship at work in the part of the treatise that refers to mural painting in Mexico, in the form of a dialogue between Couto and Clavé about Santa Teresa:

Couto: "Another mural of Ximeno has disappeared: The beautiful cupola of Our Lord in Santa Teresa, a cupola that has never had its equal in this city for its courage. . . . It all ended with the earthquake of April 7, 1845, thirty-two years after its inauguration."

Clavé: "I did not come in time to see the frescoes [*sic*] that my predecessor painted in this chapel . . . as I arrived in the year of '46."⁷⁰

The two gentlemen obviously consider the subject of Cordero's murals taboo, though finished in the same church in 1857, three years before this dialogue takes place.

The conversation then takes a practical turn, to the commissions young painters may expect in the modern world. In spite of the black outlook, Couto has a cautious idea:

There is nevertheless one genre at which perhaps they could find employment — mural painting. Perhaps the habit may be introduced, to decorate with it public buildings or the drawing rooms of the wealthy. To show this path, the gallery newly opened in our Academy has been dressed up in the new fashion, and, God helping, we will do the same with more scope on the walls and ceiling of the great hall built on the façade.⁷¹

The dialogue takes on added piquancy, knowing as we do that at the time Cordero's three great decorations, Jesús María, Santa Teresa, and San Fernando, stared Couto and Clavé in the face, with San Fernando the favorite public topic in art.

Couto and Clavé fail to show in words and in acts the deep sense of mural fitness that Cordero shows in his works. To "dress up the new gallery in the new fashion" and to covet "the drawing rooms of the wealthy" reveal little grasp of the essential relations of mural to architecture, or of its responsibilities for speaking publicly in paint.

The medallions of Sagredo were obviously not a sufficient answer to the indefatigable Cordero, and the cornered Director decided at last to paint a mural of his own,

69. The medallions painted by Sagredo are still in place. Paul Delaroche and Overbeck were the masters chosen to represent modern art. Most of the pictures proudly shown in the gallery in Clavé's time are now kept in storage.

70. Couto, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

as substantial in size and place as those of his rival. Clavé rolled up his pedogogical sleeves, and acting as foreman to a choice phalanx of five art students, started to decorate the dome of the Church of the Profesa in 1861 in oil.

The site was unmatched for fashionableness. While Cordero's San Fernando was situated halfway between town and country, Clavé's choice was at the capital's mundane hub. "Center of elegances and *buen tono* is the Church of La Profesa. . . . There is great and general anticipation to make ready for the feasts of La Profesa, and there is throughout the city much traffic and agitation to this purpose, especially in the streets of Plateros and San Francisco. Clothes shops are full, tailors and dressmakers overwhelmed with work. Unbelievable is the eagerness to show off one's new clothes. . . . Plateros Street is especially crowded with ladies who go to La Profesa in mantillas and dresses of silk and velvet, while lower class women go there in multiple skirts and fine *rebozos*."⁷²

To capture inspiration, Clavé did what he advised his students to do — he copied engravings after the German Overbeck.⁷³ His architectural setting was somewhat different from those of Cordero, for while Santa Teresa and San Fernando were hemispherical, the dome of La Profesa was divided in eight triangular segments, separated by raised moldings. The division suggested for a subject matter the seven sacraments, with the extra portion receiving an Adoration of the Cross.⁷⁴

Soon after the dome was begun, the reform laws of Juárez disbanded monastic congregations, not sparing Clavé's collective patron, the Congregation of the Oratory. Its mother-house was occupied by federal troops, and work in the church had to stop after only two of the eight panels had been started. Clavé was in fact a political suspect while Juárez was in power. Using his privilege as a foreigner, he had refused to sign a denunciation of the French intervention. The same gesture gained him favor with Maximilian, and work on the dome was resumed. It was finished in the besieged capital of the tottering Empire, while Juárez bullets whizzed by the uprights of the high scaffold. The dome was uncovered in 1867 to a distracted Republic — and it became the privilege of critics friendly to Cordero to belittle the work.

A life-long friend of Cordero, Felipe López López was one of them. He must have champed at the bit while adverse opinion attacked the repeated accomplishments of his friend, and now the elaborate report he published is in

72. Cambas, *México pintoresco* . . . , I, p. 211.

73. Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

74. A photograph of the murals has been recently reproduced, together with the criticism of López López. Justino Fernández, "Crítica de Arte en México. La crítica de Felipe López López a las pinturas de la cupula del templo de la Profesa, actualmente desaparecidas," *Anales del instituto de investigaciones estéticas*, no. 13, 1945, pp. 61-84.

its turn unfavorable to Clavé's dome. The implied rivalry between the two is its gist: Clavé's talent is not denied, but he makes clear that genius is the exclusive claim of Cordero.

The title is of itself partisan, "Critical judgment of the painting of the dome of the Temple of La Profesa, directed by Don Pelegrin Clavé, and executed in most of its parts by students of the Academy of Fine Arts of San Carlos."⁷⁵

Time and application are required to see great works to their conclusion. . . . Only genius may triumph quickly over what obstacles appear as these works proceed . . . because genius alone conceives them spontaneously, and elaborates what is sublime . . . with means of surprising simplicity.

We should not wonder then that eight years were required to finish the mural painting that decorates today the temple of La Profesa. . . .

On the intellectual plane, the direction of the work was Sr. Clavé's due, as the master. It is of public domain that the translation of his inventions and the material presentation of his compositions were left to the care of young Mexicans, his disciples. . . .

As the spectator . . . raises his eyes to the zenith of a cupola, as his sight leaves the earth that supports him and the horizon that surrounds him, what does he look for in this immensity? Do not those luminous spaces represent the celestial dome? . . . Would he rationally expect to find mortals in the element reserved for birds? Could he, without fright, see overhead a ground, vegetation and mountains? Does it make sense to represent on a concave surface the vertical surface of a façade? Can art admit of heavy chunks of material architecture in the diaphanous celestial spheres? . . .

When he raises his eyes, what should he look for? — Well said: Ideal beings, spirit messengers of his prayers, and if his faith be strong he will look for the Supreme Being in all His Majesty.

So that no subject may fit the cupola of a church that is not God in Majesty or some Apotheosis, one single subject, one single grandiose thought . . . Ximeno observed this rule in the dome of the Cathedral, and Cordero followed the model of European cupolas when he painted those of Santa Teresa and of San Fernando. . . . To introduce novelty in such a type of decoration is a temerity that reflects on the artist's credit. . . .

A rigorous analysis compels us to add that the compositor should have foreseen how a multiplicity of themes entailed diversified backgrounds and contrasting intonations: though we admit that such a contrast may be pleasant in a picture gallery, in a dome it breaks the shape, the harmony and the function.

Having concluded our critical estimate of the ideal part of the composition, and expressed *with regret*⁷⁶ what reasons are born by reflection . . . we pass eagerly to an examination of each one of the oil paintings that constitute in practice the work.

75. *Juicio Crítico sobre las pinturas de la cupula del Templo de la Profesa, dirigidas por D. Pelegrin Clavé y ejecutadas en su mayor parte por los alumnos de la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos*, Publicado en Junio de 1867 por Felipe López López, Mexico, Imprenta de La Constitución Social, 4a calle de la Providencia, num. 6, 1868. Probably a separate reprint from a newspaper article, from the aspect of the typography, and the imprint.

76. Italics in original text.

First, let us remark that oil painting is out of place here, given its preparation, its effect and expense. None of these drawbacks is unsurmountable. . . . And an abundance of cash removes other inconveniences. . . . As far as execution is concerned, oil is *much easier*⁷⁷ than tempera: He who paints in oil sees what he is doing; he who paints in tempera works blind, guesses, and what bad luck if he loses tone and values. A painting in oil is beautiful, rich in magic and agreeable: If it does not stain, if it escapes what alterations are incipient to its nature, the work we are concerned with will gain in esteem with time.

Be resigned then to an analysis of eight distinct subjects. . . .

In describing the execution of the work, opposing it sharply to its ideation, López López tucks his nails gently in, not to hurt the five young Mexican helpers.

Then, "To bind the slices that constitute the half sphere, there is an octagon, through which appears the Father of all Creation. We understand that this picture is the work of Sr. Clavé exclusively. Eager to pay tribute to his ambitious undertaking, we look eagerly for something to praise . . . but, ah! we find with profound sadness that, despite his cultured brush, Sr. Clavé erred as far as art iconology is concerned."

López López notes that the Father is too young, represented with a black beard, and concludes:

If we have expressed publicly our opinion of this work, it is only to make clear the fact that in Mexico, there are many people . . . capable of judging with some criteria the complexity of fine art compositions. It is also in the hope of stimulating the self pride of Sr. Clavé, to the end that he may leave us in some other dome . . . an unforgettable memorial of what sublimity may come out of his intelligence and the fecundity of his palette.

One important point made by López López is that Clavé was not a born mural painter, that despite the place they were in, the panels were enlarged easel pictures. Clavé seemed unmindful of what mural drawing should be, while Cordero ". . . did away with the rules of good drawing to obtain a correct effect once the work be seen in perspective." Perhaps impelled by pedagogical *noblesse oblige*, more probably because he had not reflected on the optical deformations inherent to paintings done on concave surfaces, Clavé drew his personages impeccably. The result is noted with puzzlement by Revilla, otherwise his admirer and biographer, "Some figures are seen as too long, when the curvature of the cupola fails to foreshorten them, or as very short when it does."⁷⁸ López López notes the same effect in the painted architecture. In the Matrimony panel, ". . . the little temple is of a sound architectonic structure, but falls forwards, owing to the effect resulting from the concave surface on which it is painted."⁷⁹

On the credit side, however, the possibilities of an oil

77. Italics in original text.

78. Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

79. López López, *Juicio crítico* . . . , p. 9.

palette, far wider than the tempera one, had been exploited in full. Revilla praises ". . . the intense blues and scarlets, the golden ochers and sea green of the drapes, how they play and mix with the light background tints and the diaphanous ones of far-off planes and skies, and with the metallic glow of the gold border that frames the pictures."⁸⁰ In 1914, a fire that seared the church wrecked the decoration. Today it is hard to distinguish what was a classical drape from what is a plaster scar or a saltpeter stain.

While Maximilian was in power, Juan Cordero had made another bid for the directorship of the school. The Emperor was invited to see a one-man show of his easel works, especially hung for the purpose. Appraised of what were Cordero's hopes, Clavé set up a rival exhibition by his favorite disciple, Salomé Pina, that won the approval of the sovereign and for Pina a promise of the post of Clavé, when the Catalan master had returned to Spain.⁸¹

López López, in his criticism of *La Profesora*, had dared Clavé to paint another, better cupola, but the ageing Director failed to rise to the bait. Since his landing in 1846, he had witnessed a succession of governments that ranged from a "Perpetual Dictator" to an Indian President, with an Austrian Emperor thrown in. He had passed through two wars and foreign invasions, discounting civil war. Tired, he left Mexico for his native Catalonia in February 1868, having first made sure that his departure would not bring to an end the long dictatorship of taste exerted on official Mexican art. Paradoxically, the Republic kept the promise Maximilian had made, and long-lived Salomé Pina kept Clavé's aesthetic tenets alive into the twentieth century.⁸²

As far as murals are concerned, Cordero was to have the last say. Last of the colonial church decorators, he was also to be the first to attempt lay decoration, non-religious murals to fit the rationalistic mood of the Reform period. His family doctor was Gabino Barreda who, besides the practice of medicine, was the Director of the great Preparatoria School, once the Royal College of San Ildefonso, San Pedro and San Pablo. A Comtist enthusiast, he meant to implant lay education in Catholic Mexico, to match the tendencies of the social reforms sponsored by the government of Lerdo de Tejada. Barreda spoke of ". . . the fine arts that in our country agonize for lack of a subject matter,"⁸³ and meant to restore them to health. He

thought of religious painting as a thing of the past, and believed that religion should give way to science as the inspiration of the fine arts. To help him on the job he approached his famous patient Juan Cordero,⁸⁴ and commissioned from him a first sample of the new style, a ". . . delectable ode to the immortal glory of Franklin, Fulton, and Morse."⁸⁵

After a lapse of fourteen years, the Mexican muralist returned to mural painting. It is from the faithful López López that we copy a description of the picture (Fig. 19), destroyed in 1900.⁸⁶

A painting in tempera, work of the distinguished Mexican artist, Juan Cordero, executed in the wall panel of the top landing that opens on the main corridors of the National Preparatoria School.

Minerva, goddess of wisdom, of majestic appearance, is seated on a substantial throne that symbolizes architecture. Its back is a façade of the primitive Tuscan order [*sic*]; its pediment is surmounted by two small genii seated on the diagonal slopes; they offer honorific crowns of laurel and of oak, emblems of genius and of strength.

On a lower level are seated . . . two young deities symbolizing two powerful forces: Electricity and Steam, with their respective attributes.

To the right of the protagonist . . . a number of sailors unload on the pier close to the Parthenon a cargo from boats that fill a third plane. . . . To the left, Cleo, Muse of History, writes zealously her annals that compete in speed with time. And Envy, of a ferocious countenance, is put to flight, unable to bear the sight of progress.

A third plane on the same side shows a landscape crossed by rails that lead toward farflung nations the speedy locomotive dragging its cars. . . .

The upper part of the picture ends in a splendid sky spotted with golden clouds. The glow of light on the horizon chases the night from the dark firmament, substituting at its zenith a lively sapphire blue that closes the celestial dome.⁸⁷

Cordero had painted his last religious mural, that of San Fernando, without pay. His Comtist venture brought him

84. The artist suffered from a lung ailment attributed to overwork.

85. López López, "Pintura al temple ejecutada por el distinguido artista mexicano Juan Cordero en el cuadro mural de la meseta superior que da paso a los corredores principales de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria," *El Federalista*, no. 1347. Reprinted as an appendix to *Poesías y Discursos leídos en la festividad en que la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria laureando al eminente artista Don Juan Cordero le dio un testimonio público de gratitud y admiración, por el cuadro mural con que ha embellecido su edificio*, Mexico, Imprenta del Comercio de N. Chávez, calle de Cordobanes Num. 8, 1874, p. 42.

86. *Poesías y Discursos* . . . , pp. 31-44.

87. After the destruction of the panel, José Terrez, Director of the Preparatoria School, commissioned Juan M. Pacheco in 1904 to copy the original oil study that Cordero painted in preparation for the mural.

Now that the mural is destroyed and the original Cordero study lost, our best visual knowledge of the mural comes from the Pacheco copy, in the collection of Licenciado Alfonso Toro.

80. Revilla, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

82. Another Clavé favorite, Don Santiago Rebull, was for a while in charge of the painting classes. Aesthetically a sound Ingrist, his influence transcended the tenets of the Catalan master.

83. In the coronation speech. As Barreda's speech is missing in part from the pamphlet of the Biblioteca Nacional, I quote from the reprint in *Boletín de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, Feb. 19, 1909.

little more. Contemporaries imply as much, calling the picture “. . . a most valuable gift,”⁸⁸ adding, “Justice asks from us some compensation, may it be gratitude.”⁸⁹ This last suggestion was duly followed, and in somewhat flamboyant fashion. A booklet records the events of November 29, 1874, that form a mundane apotheosis to the career of the painter: *Poem and speeches read in the National Preparatory School on the occasion of the crowning with laurels of the eminent artist Juan Cordero*. Professor Rafael Angel de la Peña spoke in the name of the faculty, praising

. . . the brush of Sr. Cordero, whose strokes express . . . the thought that has presided over the formation of the present curriculum. . . . Two of the most beautiful figures conjured by his magic brush observe in relaxed postures and with deep attention, the first, the initial transformation of steam, and the second a magnetic compass. They doubtless personify the sciences that flourish today through the practice of observation, the experimental method, and a well sustained logic, sciences that have given birth to Industry with its prodigious inventions. . . . Immarcescible laurels to knowledge and to genius, and to dark ignorance and black envy, what chastisement is their due.⁹⁰

Student Salvador Castellot spoke in the name of his schoolmates, and Poet Guillermo Prieto read an inspired composition. Then came the crowning act of the ceremony. Director and Doctor Don Gabino Barrera addressed himself to his friend and patient.⁹¹

It is the glorious lot of the Preparatory School to blaze a new trail for Mexican aesthetics. We feel proud of having inspired to the genius of a true artist a composition meant to immortalize the Spirits of Science and of Industry that stand for the pacific activities of man. . . .

This creation of genius is linked in an indissoluble way to a wall of our school. . . . As a token of this indissoluble union, the Preparatory School places today by my hand on the brow of this sublime artist the symbol of immortality.

At this juncture the artist was crowned with a laurel wreath of solid gold, weighing 360 grams, treasured by his family to this day.⁹² Barrera concluded:

This glorification of art that science achieves in its own temple, this frank and loyal acknowledgment that heart rates over intelligence, this noble subordination of science to love, are an immense moral progress of which our school gives today the pioneer example. Glory to art! Glory to genius!⁹³

88. *Poesias y Discursos* . . . , p. 16.

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-11.

91. *Boletín de la Escuela* . . . , Feb. 19, 1909.

92. Now in the collection of Sra. Asunción Cordero de Sánchez. The crown was weighed and photographed at my request while exhibited at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1945. It is inscribed “Al regio artista mexicano Juan Cordero//La Escuela Nacional Preparatoria en testimonio de gratitud. Noviembre de 1874.”

93. *Boletín*, Feb. 19, 1909.

The crowned Cordero answered somewhat lamely:

May these brush strokes . . . reveal my love of country and my desire for the progress of a studious youth. With this understanding, señores, I accept joyfully the laurel with which you garland my humble work. The best leaf in my artist's crown, this wreath will have a conspicuous place in my studio and seeing it there, Inspiration will descend on my palette. . . .⁹⁴

The students of the school had a well-earned reputation for restlessness and ebullency. The master knew that his message was addressed to none-too-placid hearers. To placate them, he had recourse to a plastic stratagem, that of painting in the foreground “. . . a childish genie with a finger raised to his lips to impose quiet and to invite contemplation.”⁹⁵

As a teacher, De la Peña well knew the mischievousness of his wards. He comments, “The child urges order and silence, surely not from grownups who need no such admonition, but from children and adolescents — to be blunt, from the students of the Preparatoria.”⁹⁶

The following speaker was the young Castellot, who knew students from inside. He insists, “This picture is . . . the most exalted jewel to be cared for jealously . . . keep it eternally.”⁹⁷

And Guillermo Prieto, in soothing verse,

. . . Artist, enjoy your work. What treasures
Of magical talent you gave us
Will be kept here . . .⁹⁸

López López summed up in prose, “Will the National Preparatory School . . . obtain that its students show toward this beautiful painting all the care, respect and love that it deserves, through the series of successive generations the school awaits? . . . We hope so.”⁹⁹ Neither eloquence nor the naïve recourse to a painted prefect could keep the youngsters in check. In 1900, the mutilated picture was replaced by a gaudy stained-glass window made in Switzerland.¹⁰⁰

This mural, *The Triumph of Science and Labor over Ignorance and Sloth*, is the last that Cordero painted. What taboo Couto and Clavé had imposed in official circles as concerned his murals also extended to his easel

94. *Poesias y Discursos* . . . , pp. 29-30.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

100. Also representing Minerva as the goddess of wisdom. The original slogan “Saber para prever: Prever para obrar!” is replaced by a less searching one, “Amor, Orden y Progreso.” Rivera suggests that the picture was destroyed partly because the old slogan had acquired a revolutionary meaning, once the dictatorship of Díaz was well established.

paintings. Cordero had not shown at the Academy exhibitions since 1854, the date of the scandal attendant upon the showing of *The Redeemer and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, and the beginning of his feud with Pelegrin Clavé. Since then, a discreet boycott had been extended to his means of living; portrait painting in the capital was capitalized by the Director of the School, being the one genre in which his sluggish brush remained proficient. To pay for the care of a rapidly increasing family, and to allow himself the luxury of painting murals for nothing, Cordero had to work in a seasonal schedule reminiscent of that of his *mercero* days. One market untapped by Clavé was far-off Yucatán, a tropical state whose land communications with central Mexico were nonexistent. Year after year, Cordero would make the trip by sea, having perfected a procedure that Revilla brands as "semi-industrial," to beat the official monopoly. From Yucatán he brought back reams of photographs of would-be sitters to be returned the next season as portraits in oil. In the capital, he painted *a la prima* and without further benefit of model one portrait per day.¹⁰¹

After his coronation, Cordero felt that the old feud with the school had collapsed with the departure of Clavé and the public recognition of his worth. In 1875, he staged a comeback at the Academy show after thirty years of absence, sending that year an *Immaculate Conception* and a *Family Portrait* (Fig. 20).¹⁰² His work still kept the

101. This paper is concerned more exclusively with Cordero as a muralist. His portraits are interesting perhaps because they were painted without benefit of model. They gain in purity what they lose in animation. His way of reaching the truth was rational rather than realistic. One of the portraits exhibited in 1945, dating from 1874, was painted after the death of the model. Cordero asked the brother of the dead man to pose for color and complexion, while using a photograph for the drawing. The same man who posed for him is still alive, and told me the story.

102. *Catálogo* . . . , 1875, "No. 38. Juan Cordero: Una Purísima. Pertenciente al Licenciado Martínez de la Torre.

"No. 48. Cuadro de familia. Del Sr. Licenciado Manuel Cordero."

This last picture is responsible in part for the writing of this paper. A distinguished art scholar from the United States visited the display of works of the master staged in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Before this picture she remarked, "And to think that in the same year Degas was in New Orleans!"

Meant as an unfavorable comment on Cordero's art, the exclamation implies that art is created in a void, rather than molded by continental, racial, and local conditions. It parallels the one that Louis XIV spat at a Le Nain, "Eloignez de moi ces magots!"

Naturally, the Frenchman rates far above Cordero in the qualities that his native Paris bred, in finesse, in Japonaiserie, in cynicism, and also in an intellectual sifting of means that is a hallmark of all France. But in his short trip to Cordero's continent, the European Degas was ill at ease. While in New Orleans, his letters mention creole beauty, and black mammies with bandana kerchiefs. But to paint he preferred a cotton counter, business men, cashiers, vendors and customers, everyone dressed like *notaires*; in picturesque Louisiana all that resembled most a world observed from the top seat of the Parisian omnibus. He longed for his Paris studio where he had left unfinished a set of studies of laundresses

power to shock, as it had for so long. Twenty-two-year-old José Martí, the future Cuban hero, who eked a living as a newspaper reporter, criticized the latter for its "Dantesque combinations of color." And he says of a detail of the former, "This strong armed angel, draped in green, is illuminated by a light more adequate to Hell than to the pure celestial spaces."¹⁰³

Cordero died in Popotla May 28, 1884. His life and his work acquire increased meaning in the light of the recent flowering of a national school with its accent on mural painting. The present justifies his conviction that Mexican art would soon tread its own way in aesthetics as it already did in politics. Hence Cordero's impatience with what retarded such a transformation, his impetuous talk of "I did not sacrifice the best years of my life in foreign countries . . . to come back to my own *patria* to serve under Sr. Clavé." He not only painted walls, but understood the technical and optical problems that make of murals something radically different from enlarged oil pictures. A remarkable analysis of his mural style by López López opposes his method to that of his contemporaries, "Without nature, without model, even without a sketch, all is born of fantasy, results of calculations, fruit of the artist's school. This is not an easel picture, a study, or a work made with academic resources."¹⁰⁴ Optically, Cordero anticipated the practice of modern muralists when he ". . . did away with the rules of good drawing to obtain a correct effect once the work is seen in perspective."¹⁰⁵ A premonition of post-cubism permeates such sayings as, "The calculations that enter into the composition include the vanishing effect from certain visual points, to be corrected by means of a certain diagram based on what allowance is to be made for not drawing on a flat surface."¹⁰⁶

starching full-dress shirts and cuffs. Consciously, he closes his eyes and mind to the enormity of the New World, ends a letter with a wistful, elliptical "Vive le fin!" and soon returns to Paris and *blanchisseuses*.

Granted that Degas is a greater artist than Cordero, Cordero is more vital to the history of American art.

103. José Martí, "Una visita a la exposición de Bellas Artes," *La Revista Universal*, December 29, 1875. Reprinted in *Martí en México*, III, p. 82.

104. *Poesías y Discursos* . . . , p. 41.

105. At least he understood as they do that the drawing made on a spherical surface is not identical to its optical images. When José Clemente Orozco was in the flush of painting his first cupola in Guadalajara, he told me, "It is grand. I can draw it correctly and the wall queers it all by itself."

106. The allowance for more than one point from where to view a mural implied in this passage is at the base of what post-cubist muralists call a fourth dimension. Compare for example what Rivera said in 1923 of his first mural in *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación*, I, no. 3, p. 368: "The painting of the scenarium that covers an area of more than ninety square meters, and whose personages measure over twelve feet in height, is only the focus from which the corollary compositions of lateral walls and vault will issue. . . . The total work is one single composi-



FIG. 14. Mexico City, Santa Teresa, Chapel of Christ, Pendentive: Cordero, Saint Luke

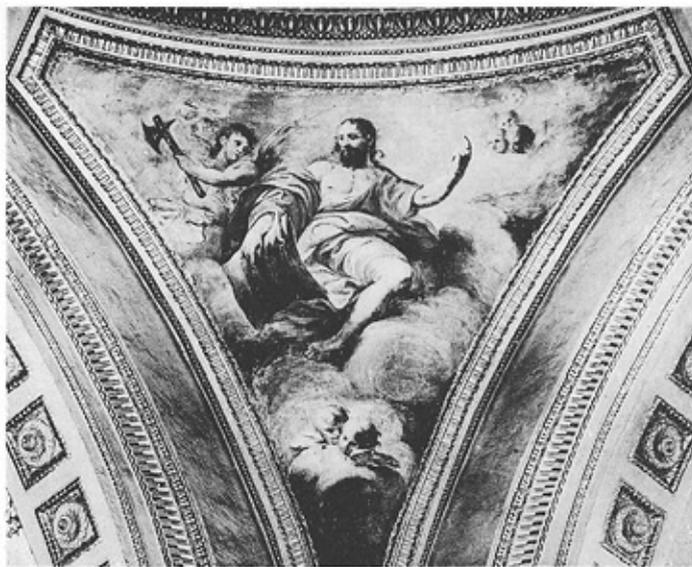


FIG. 16. Mexico City, Santa Teresa, Chapel of Christ, Pendentive: Ximeno y Planes, Saint Matthew, 1813

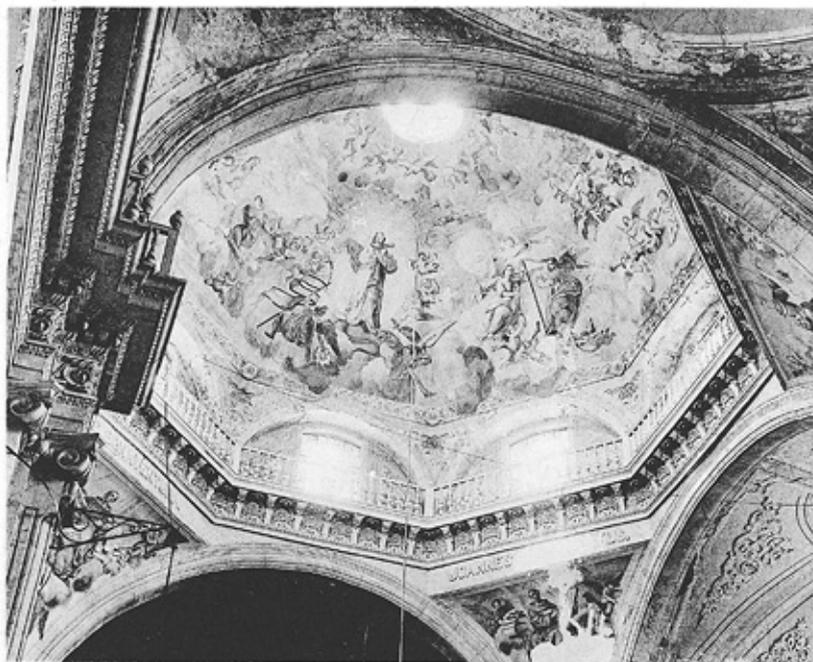


FIG. 17. Mexico City, San Fernando, Cupola: Cordero, The Immaculate Conception, 1860



FIG. 18. Mexico City, San Fernando, Pendentive: Cordero, Nicolaus a Lira



FIG. 19. Mexico City, Collection Licenciado Alfonso Toro: Juan M. Pacheco, Copy of a Study by Cordero for Triumph of Science and Labor over Ignorance and Sloth



FIG. 20. Mexico City, Collection Cordero y Codallos: Cordero, The Four Daughters of Don Manuel Cordero, 1875

Cordero's sponsorship of tempera, as being a true mural medium, was little short of heroic in a place and period where suavity of effects and the gradations inherent to glazes and lakes were considered a *sine qua non* of the fine art. Four years after the painter's death, García Cubas still notes of his work, "The paintings in tempera . . . are noticeably inferior to those executed in oil."¹⁰⁷ To appreciate the temperas properly, an eye attuned to the more recent frescoes was needed.

Cordero believed that the Mexican artist need no more rely on imported pigments than on imported aesthetics. His sponsoring of cheap local pigments used by house painters in preference to what Paris offered has champions today among Mexican fresco painters.¹⁰⁸ Cordero's accurate

tion and the cluster of paintings, once identified with the three-dimensional architecture and the changing aspects of its diverse parts, will create in the mind of the spectator an additional dimension."

107. Cubas, *Diccionario geográfico* . . ., 1888, article "Cordero."

108. A notable inroad of nationalism in the field of technique was the so-called Mexican fresco. The medium, evolved by the painter Xavier Guerrero after a study of pre-Hispanic murals and

foresight anticipated that government patronage should be at the hub of any extensive mural program. It was put into words by his friend López López in 1874, ". . . recommending to the good taste and culture of the administration the convenient beautification of public buildings with mural paintings. . . . The schools of medicine, law, mining, agriculture, and commerce . . . the palaces of the Government, of justice, city halls and others that house the administrative sovereignty, all need distinctive marks and wait for the brush and chisel of Mexican artists, dedicated to the study of the fine arts to the end that such places be spared the trite appearance of private dwellings."¹⁰⁹ It was not the lot of Cordero's generation to see the realization of a clearly defined national style, but his merit lies in that he foresaw its coming, and eased the transition with his works.

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the folk habits of house painters, included the use of nopal sap as an agglutinant. Rivera's early murals in the Ministry of Education, Mexico City, were painted in this way.

109. *Poesías y Discursos* . . ., p. 43.

Archives, Cordero lb. In Charlot "Cordero...", I told the story of the artist's career. Now I refer to it only inasmuch as it weaves itself into the story of the Academy. Previously unused documents add to, or modify on minor points, the published version. Riano's letter is No. 1b of the following list, compiled and tentatively numbered for easier reference, of what Cordero material I met with in the archives of the Academy:

- 1a. 1845, November 19. Letter from Tomas Cordero, father of Juan, asking that a pension be granted to his son in Rome.
- 1b. 1845, November 24. The letter is endorsed by trustee Honorato Riano.
(Both documents, Archives, 1845.)
2. 1846, January 24. The governing board grants the pension to Cordero. (Actas A.)
3. 1850, July 30. Autograph letter from Cordero, written from Florence, and addressed to the Secretary of the Academy, on sending his "Columbus". (XVII-2-1850.)
4. 1850, October 15. Letter 3. is read to the Board in session. (Actas B, p. 31.)
5. 1851, February 18. The governing board votes a gratification of 400 pesos to Cordero for his "Columbus." (Actas B, p. 30.)
6. n.d. (?). On "Columbus". (Box 1861-1863, folder 1858.)

7. 1852. On the return, "this coming year", of Cordero from Rome. (Box 1861-1863, folder 1858.)
8. 1853. Autograph letter. Cordero sends pictures to Mexico, and is named a member of the Italian Academia Scientifica. (XXVII - 5 - 1853.)
9. 1853, May 30. Concerning Cordero's pension, and that 500 pesos have been earmarked for his return. (Actas B, p. 144.)
10. 1853, June 30. O'Brien of Paris queries the school board regarding the expense of Cordero's return trip. (XXVI-5-1853.)
- 11a. 1853, October 31. O'Brien acknowledges receipt of 2500 francs to finance Cordero's return.
- 11b. Same date. Receipt signed by Cordero, and originally enclosed with the letter 11a. (Both documents XXVI-8-1853.)
12. 1854, January 27. Cordero is considered for the subdirectorship of the school. (Actas B, p. 167.)
- 13a. 1855, June 27. Letter from the Ministry of the Interior to Bernardo Couto. That Cordero is to succeed Clavé as director of the school.
- 13b. Same date. Envelope of same, with a scribbled first draft of Couto's answer. (Both documents 1854-8, folder captioned, "Documentos sobre la solicitud de Dn. Juan Cordero para la plaza de Director de Pintura.")
14. 1855, August 8. Vilar testifies to Clavé's fitness

as director, and attacks that of Cordero.
(1854-8.)

15. 1855, September 2. The incident is discussed in board meeting. (Actas B, pp. 185-186.)
16. 1855, October 20. The newly formed government advises Couto that the directorship is to be given in an open contest. (1854-8.)
17. 1855, November 16. Letter 16 is read to the board. (Actas B, p. 195.)
18. 1855, December 9. Clavé's contract is renewed. (Actas B, pp. 196-197.)
19. 1855, December 16. Second board meeting on the subject, to insure a quorum. (Actas B, pp. 199-200.)
20. n.d. probably 1855. Couto lists reasons why the directorship should be left in the hands of Clavé. (Box 1861-1863, folder 1858.)
21. n.d. Dates of the Academy scholarships, including that of Cordero. (Box XXI, 1843-1869, folder 1.)
- 22a. 1864, December 15. Cordero asks permission to hold a one man show at San Carlos. His plea is granted by Don Urbano Fonseca, December 20.
- 22b. List of works exhibited.
(Both documents Box 1864, folder No. 54, labelled "Sobre la solicitud de D. Juan Cordero que pide se le facilite una galeria de las del Establecimiento para hacer una Exposicion de sus obras de pintura.")

Revilla, Obras p. 203.

Cordero, que tenía pintados algunos buenos retratos á la familia Escandón, solicito y obtuvo de D. Vicente y D. Antonio, que gozaban de valimiento en la Corte, el que Maximiliano fuese a ver varios cuadros del pintor, que al intento habia expuesto en un salón de la Academia, á fin de dársele á conocer por tal medio, ganarse su favor como artista y allanarse el camino para la sucesion de Clavé en la Academia. Acabada de instalar dicha Exposicion, he aqui lo que el viejo maestro escribia á su discipulo [Clavé to Pina, then in Rome] : "Cordero, desde que llegó, no pierde de vista el puesto que á fines de 1865 dejaré vacante, y para llamar más la atención sobre si, ha pedido al señor Fonseca (sucesor de D. Fernando Ramirez en la direccion de la Academia) un sitio en la Escuela para colocar sus cuadros y ha-//p.204//cer una Exposición pública de ellos. Ha presentado "La Adúltera", Moisés, "La Oración del Huerto," un cuadrato de Atala, dos cuadrillos de bañadoras estilo Ridet, una Concepcion y varios retratos, y un periódico ha dicho al mismo tiempo, que "el insigne pintor mexicano Cordero, ha expuesto sus bellisimas obras." De todo esto deduzco que se presentará como candidato para mi puesto, y con la habilidad que se le conoce, temo fundadamente que logre su intento. Si V. piensa radicarse en Mexico, debe optar por mi puesto y venirse pronto y antes de que se tome una resolucíon sobre la clase."

parallism
by
Revilla?

p. 204.

Tan presto como hubo cerciorádose Clavé de que el Emperador iria á la Academia, acelerada y sigilosamente hizo colocar, á su vez, en departamento distinto del elegido por Cordero, los cuadros /que Pina habia remitido de Europa como pensionado, incluso el de "La Piedad," de que era dueña la viuda de Couto; hecho esto, esperó que Maximiliano viese lo de Cordero, invitándolo inmediatamente después á pasar á donde se hallaban las obras de su discipulo, con gran sorpresa de los circunstantes, que comprendieron todo el alcance de la estratagema. El Emperador no tuvo (el) menor reparo en acceder á ello, y pasó á ver los cuadros de Pina, impresionándole tan vivamente la idealidad del asunto, la fuerza de ejecucion y la magia del colorido que resplandecen en "La Piedad", que en gran parte desvaneciése en él el favorable efecto de las obras de Cordero, y presa del entusiasmo que le despertó "La Piedad," no sólo manifestése anuente á que fuese su autor quien sucederia á Clavé en la enseñanza de la pintura, sino que dióle á aquél mismo el encargo de pintar en Roma un cuadro conmemorativo de la visita que hizo Pio IX á Maximiliano y á Carlota, en el palacio Mariscotti de la ciudad romúlea, nombrándole además á poco, caballero de la Orden Imperial de Guadalupe, distinción ésta que no concedió ni á Clavé ni á Cordero.

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(le) [sic]