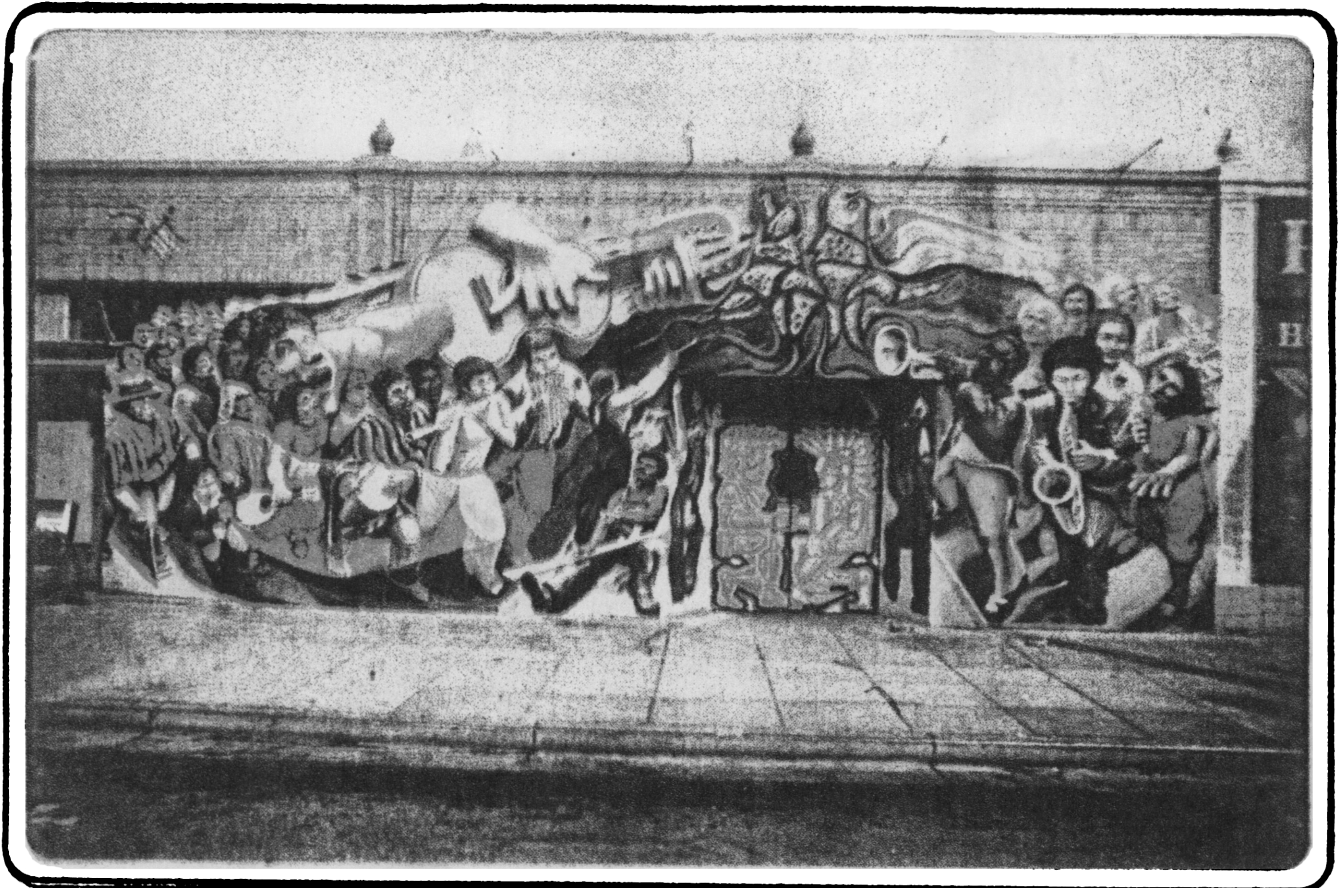




NEWSLETTER 1978



"La Peña," Commonarts, Berkeley, see p. 6



MESSAGE FROM JEAN CHARLOT

My friend, John Weber, having asked me to send to the Congress of Muralists a short message of welcome, here goes.

The birth of the Mexican mural renaissance happened over half a century ago, and I took an active part in this historical happening. This statement suggests that indeed I have reached maturity. But old age is rarely synonymous with wisdom. All I may offer you will be little more than a rehash of what thoughts came to me on top of the scaffold when at work throughout these past fifty years, and as well, when loitering between murals. Not thoughtful logic, rather a perpetual wonder that this strange vocation of mine happens to be so totally at odds with the orderly world we live in, not only the world of business, but even with the specialized world of art that should, or so I would like to think, receive us with open arms.

In a world where selling goods is the pursuit of most, where goods are manufactured and packaged to attract, by means fair or foxy, the buyer, the mural painter 'misses the boat'. His product is created against the grain of the practical logic that is a key to our culture. In the case of the artist, the middleman between producer and consumer is normally the art dealer but, even with the best of good will, how could he handle our awkward offerings. They cannot be exhibited in art galleries, cannot be framed or packaged. For the interior decorator, expertly juggling with bibelots from East and West, murals remain white elephants. The art collector can hardly fit such uncouth giants amidst his expensively framed oils.

Produced with great pain and effort the goods that the muralist offers have no place in an orderly state of things, even in art circles. No wonder that the less stubborn, the more amenable among us, realizing the quandary, come down from the scaffold, shrink their products to easel size and tie themselves to the apron strings of art dealers. It happened in our Mexico fifty years ago. It will doubtless happen to your brand new generation of muralists.

In México, in my youth, well-intentioned friends, far from appreciating our polychromed walls, would gently beg us to reform, to subscribe instead to art magazines and learn of what was being done in New York or Paris, in a word to stop doing what we were doing and toe the line of international art. They meant well. We thanked them but we proceeded as before. That we perservered was not by choice, not because we had, as the saying has it, hitched our wagon to a star, but rather by a sort of animal instinct. The long hours of work on the scaffold, between stone carvers and masons, did not leave us enough intellectual leisure to even open an art magazine and no curiosity whatsoever to observe what more polite forms of art received applause in foreign countries.

If the present generation of muralists proves equally stubborn and uncouth, then be sure that, either when you shall be very old or very dead, guidebooks will extoll the merits of your murals, carloads of tourists will gape open mouthed at them, museums will hang on their hallowed walls fresco fragments from these Twentieth Century old masters.

A sarcastic footnote to repay one for a lifetime of hard work! Yet there is this consolation to know that, for those who persevere, the painted walls they mean as a message for the many shall belatedly be looked at by the many and, haloed that these murals shall be with what respect recession in time alone procures, that the message they contain will be at last understood.

Jean Charlot

