

POSADA'S MEXICO

EDITED BY RON TYLER



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This catalog and the exhibition are dedicated to the
memory of Jean Charlot (1898–1979), in honor of
the pioneering work he did and the passion
he felt for it.





José Guadalupe Posada and His Successors

JEAN CHARLOT

It is with mixed feelings that one is called to witness the rise of José Guadalupe Posada to international fame. In my youth, leafing through art books, I fancied Old Masters as all of a type, patterned after da Vinci's self portrait, with words of wisdom coming out of their beards. I was wrong. The aura reserved for such choice immortals already hesitantly hovers over Posada's brown pate. No bearded sage he. Sturdy body heavily fleshed, the fists of a manual worker, baggy pants held by tired suspenders. See him pushing a wheelbarrow, trundling home a full keg of tequila to last throughout his well-earned annual leave. Undoubtedly a lowbrow.

Of the three neighbors who certified his death in 1913, only one knew how to sign his name. The state paid for a burial of the sixth class.

The bulk of Posada's graphic output remains eminently vulnerable. Penny sheets, street gazettes, workers' opposition leaflets, pilgrimage mementos, all were struck on the cheapest of papers, the opposite of acid-free, as print curators acidly remark. Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, Posada's major publisher, felt as casual as the artist regarding a future for such fragile merchandise. The stories told could be genuine news, belatedly filched from bourgeois newspapers, or else issued straight out of Don Antonio's fertile brain. All—crimes of passion, housemaid's keys to dreams, reports of miracles—were tuned to simple folks.

So restricted was Posada's horizon that those who love him feel a tinge of apprehension as his lifework is thrust forth into the uncharted world of museums, curators, and dealers. To clarify his fiercely limited relation to Mexico it could help to mention the Flemish masters who visited Renaissance Italy. Those among them who adopted the fashions from south of the Alps are mostly forgotten. Peter Brueghel the Elder is the one best remembered. Though he had watched Michelangelo at work high on his scaffold, what he brought back he had anyhow taken with him from the start, an indestructible faith in the Flemish land and the Flemish folk.

Having traveled, these men had a choice. Guadalupe Posada clung to his Mexico throughout his life like a limpet to its rock. For most of his adult days

OPPOSITE PAGE:

José Guadalupe Posada Surrounded by His Admirers, by Alfredo Zalce. Detail from a penny sheet in linocut. Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1948. *Jean Charlot Collection.*

JEAN CHARLOT, artist and art historian, wrote numerous articles on Posada, as well as other works such as *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925.*

the nation remained quiescent under the benign fist of Gen. Don Porfirio Díaz, elected president seven times. The old soldier favored for his cabinet *científicos*, the so-called learned ones, owlishly sporting enlarged eyeglasses. These glasses hinted at studies lasting from dusk to dawn, presumably carried out for the benefit of their mostly illiterate countrymen.

Perhaps more brain than heart guided these pundits. All well-to-do's prayed that their Don Porfirio would never fade away, for they knew that chaos would result. With the fervor one puts into fingering beads they clung to a saying dear to the conservatives: "El que nace en petate siempre huele a petate," or "He who is born on a straw mat shall stink of straw all his life."

A *petate* is the hand-plaited mat that the poor use for a bed, laid flat on a floor of beaten earth. The pungent odor of straw clings to it and—should the proverb prove true—to the newborn delivered on the mat, the midwife receiving for fee a few chickens if no money is at hand.

Thus in 1852, in Aguascalientes, Guadalupe Posada was born. To the smell of straw that branded the infant as an untouchable must be added the white odor of fresh dough, for his father was a baker. His disused oven may still be seen in the communal patio of the *casa de vecindad*, the cluster of rooms that the family Posada shared with others working at similar barely rewarded trades.

LIFE

In Aguascalientes Posada was apprenticed to the master printer J. Trinidad Pedroza and later worked with him in León, attaining a rare balance of art and artisanship. In León his patient smoothing of the lithographic stone offered a surface of itself genteel. Pen in hand, Posada covered it with calligraphic tendrils that opened seemingly at random to frame small vignettes: visual reportings of what that month loomed large in the provincial town. Or else he faithfully copied from Spanish or French weeklies dazzling glimpses of a faraway cosmopolitan world—a bemedaled picture admired at the Madrid Annual Salon or a titbit from the Parisian stage.

Posada, now married and a father, reached for bourgeois security. At the state school he became, so it is said, professor of lithography. More accurately, he was named technical assistant to the professor, a title to which still clung a whiff of the manual worker that his father, the baker, had been. Catastrophic floods may have resulted in deaths that scattered the family and forever severed his ties, however tenuous, with the academic world. With his son and packing the lithographic press he owned, he left León for the capital.

When next we meet Posada in Mexico City, it is as a sort of vagrant engraver. Publisher Vanegas Arroyo reminisced: "Every morning, before coming to my shop, Posada made the rounds of the other printing firms, asking if there were any engravings they needed. If they said yes, out of the capacious pockets of his coat came an engraving block and a burin. Right there on the spot Posada would cut the needed vignette, or portrait, or whatever was asked for. That job over he walked on to the next shop, repeating his question."¹

Posada joined the team of writers and engravers that Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo ably coached. As engravers, the Manillas, father and son, held seniority

1. A conversation remembered by Alfredo Zalce.

in the shop. Without boosting unduly their innocent accomplishments, one can say they were genuine artisanal artists. Their preferred medium was a white line furrowed out of the block inked in black. Published in 1892, the ads hemmed in between grocers, hatters, and shoemakers, theirs spells out their multiple endeavors:

Manuel Manilla and Son. This firm, specializing in engravings, is located in the third booth at No. 12 Pulquería de Palacio. We cut all kind of designs in wood and metal, mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell [and] paint commercial signboards. We also electrotype stereotypes with utmost perfection, specializing in elevations and views of buildings. We carve seals in both rubber and metal, design stamps and monograms.

Mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell are materials used for highcombs, fans, and earrings. We also should remember that in Mexico commercial signboards, notwithstanding the lettering, could be fully pictorial.

Justly conscious of the quality of the ink lithographs that in the provinces had been his specialty, Posada drew a few sheets in that style. In his new surroundings they somehow seemed misplaced. With a sense of fitness enforced presumably by hints from his employer, Posada switched to the coarser relief cuts that blended smoothly with the Manilla output. Now Don Antonio could lay out his penny sheets freely mixing Manillas and Posadas and add for spice the flotsam and jetsam come to him from defunct firms, plus a few maverick cuts that had drifted to Mexico from Europe and the United States.

Besides this teamwork, Posada opened his own workshop at Santa Inez, No. 5, there to house and man his lithographic press. It was an address well chosen to inspire the newcomer, situated at the borderline between two contrasting Mexicos. One was the last vestige of the great Tenochtitlán. Boatloads of fruits and vegetables glided into the city from farmlands on the crisscross web of ancient waterways, a sight barely modified from the one that greeted Cortez on arrival. On feast days, vegetables gave way to canoe loads of flowers with Indian girls paddling the dugout punts, festively dressed in plaited skirts held by wide belts home-woven, each of a color and design typical of her village.

Less gracefully, the city sewage flowed into the canal, and neighboring pulquerías catered to the noisy crowds of sellers and buyers. For centuries the back alleys had kept their lowbrow names: de la Leña, where wood was sold, de la Pulquería, the rowdiest of all. Or, more mysteriously, de Machincuepa, though who had somersaulted there and why was now fogged by time. And, de la Alhondiga, from a tax on Indian produce, *alhondigaje*, a term already obsolete in the eighteenth century.

From the edge of this shredded remnant of a Tenochtitlán once known as the Venice of New Spain, in a few steps Posada could reach the city center, the Zócalo, as haughty as the water markets were disreputable. Majestic the cathedral, built so as to seal underground the Aztec main temple. Yet one did not have to dig much deeper than a rooster might scratch to bring to light monolithic monsters. In New Spain, lest the implanted faith be shaken, inquisitors hurriedly buried them again. In an age of enlightenment, the idols were carted a city block away to the Casa de Moneda, once the Viceregal Mint, transformed into a budding museum.

Inside the sturdy cathedral, the Altar of the Kings was all baroque and gold, a shower of solidified sunstreaks, while in the side chapels coal-black Christs in

purple loincloths and Madonnas transfixed by seven swords bled in the damp darkness.

Only twice a day, at dawn and dusk, did these opposite worlds briefly overlap. By open *braseros*, *marchantas* squatted on the pavement, cooking and selling hot foods. Posada has preserved for us their features—or rather, so wrapped up are they against the night cold, their featureless countenances. Don Antonio added their names and their callings:

Rosita la camotera,
 Lupe la tripera,
 Petronilla la pollera,
 Agapita la quesera,
 Doña Paz, la tamalera.

To translate would be to weaken the style and power latent in this lay litany.

Though Posada and the revolution are forever linked in the history of art, on the whole his life was lived in a Mexico at peace. Posada was still a child when was played the mediocre and bloody scenario that conned an Austrian archduke into sitting on a lethal imperial throne. Throughout most of the following half century Mexico had for its shepherd a genuine military hero, Don Porfirio Díaz. By 1910—the year of his seventh reelection as head of state—the charisma of the chosen one was indeed in need of a thorough dusting. Liberals clamored for drastic changes, staking their freedom always and often their lives on a slogan of no reelection.

Only during the last two years of his life, by now approaching his sixties, could Posada watch the nation shake off belatedly the spell Don Porfirio had cast. Scattered at random over the map, liberal sparks flickered quickly and were as quickly doused. Names now famous made small news. For blowing up a federal train Pancho Villa was jailed. Across the Rio Grande liberals exiled themselves from the land they loved, the future president Francisco I. Madero but one among the many. "Should he ever dare put foot on Mexican soil, a cell awaits him." Thus boasted the government.

Zapata the peasant leader remained a favorite of Posada the image maker. Not that the parceling of arable land to farmers meant overmuch to the son of the Aguascalientes baker, but Zapata—from head to foot, from his silver-embroidered, wide-brimmed black sombrero to his overgrown spurs—cooled Posada's hot burin, unaccustomed as it was to balanced beauty.

As expected, Madero became president on November 6, 1911. Until his own death in January 1913, Posada could very well believe that, with the national unrest tapering off, the country would stay substantially at peace, its dynamic plea for justice won!

VANEGAS ARROYO, PUBLISHER

Though neither Posada nor Don Antonio spared a thought for future researchers, they nevertheless documented their trade with an eye for customers and sales. The back covers of their smallest booklets—5½ by 3½ inches—often served that purpose. The "ad" spread over the whole minute page featured alternating views of the pressroom and the salesroom.

In one, the pressroom. A self-sketch centered importantly. With a discreet

IMPRESA
DE A. VANEGAS ARROYO
(fundada en el Siglo XIX año de 1880)



En esta antigua casa se halla un variado y selecto surtido de canciones para el presente año.
Coleccion de felicitaciones, Sueños de Prestidigitacion, Adivinanzas, Juegos de Estrado, Cuadernos de Cocina, Dulcero, Pastelero, Brindis, Versos para Payaso, Discursos Patrióticos, Comedias para niños ó literos Bonitos Cuentos.

EL NUEVO ORÁCULO
O SEA EL LIBRO DEL PORVENIR
Reglas para echar las cartas
EL NUEVO ABOGADO MEXICANO
LA MAGIA PRIETA Y BLANCA
O sea el libro de los Brujos.

POSADA

Imprenta de A. Vanegas Arroyo. Posada's depiction of the press-room, with a self-portrait. Jean Charlot Collection.

suggestion of portliness, Posada, in printer's apron and wearing the familiar visor, hands a proofsheets just off the platen press to his employer, Don Antonio, splendid in his long overcoat, high collar, and high hat, his beard punctiliously cropped. Piled up on the floor ready to be picked up, bundles of printed sheets are undeniably proof of a prosperous business. In the background, hinted at in a few lines, passersby help locate the pressroom at street level.

In the other self-advertisement, the same room seen from the customers' entrance. A circular counter separates the salesroom from the work area. Turning her back on the workers, Mrs. Vanegas Arroyo sits behind the counter, in lace collar and high hairdo, sporting puffed sleeves and a wasp waist. She attends to the needs of a pair of customers, one a country peddler, the other a city bureaucrat. The contrasting types are well chosen to illustrate the wide span of interests catered to by the firm.

In both views the lower half of the page, artfully tied to the vignettes by a sturdy version of art nouveau, is reserved for the text. It lists the variety of subjects kept in stock and gives at least a hint of Posada's versatility as an illustrator.

Founded in the year 1880 of the nineteenth century,
 this ancient firm stocks a wide choice:
 Collections of Greetings, Tricks, Puzzles, Games, Cookbooks,
 Recipes for Making Candies and Pastries,
 Models of Speeches, Scripts for Clowns, Patriotic Exhortations,
 Playlets Meant for Children or Puppets, Pleasant Tales,
 Also: the Novel Oracle,
 Rules for Telling the Cards,
 a New Set of Mexican Prognostications,
 Books of Magic, Both Brown and White,
 a Handbook for Witches.

Though presenting in their best light the workings of the firm, Posada does not distort the facts. However rustic the means, Vanegas Arroyo had a vast and complex market for his goods. The packages in the pressroom ready to go were to reach eventually the farthest corners of the nation. In the salesroom scene a flock of papeleros running out of the shop with armfuls of news sheets were the means, primitive but effective, of mining pennies out of that other, equally substantial market, Mexico City.

Mexico was, and to a great extent still is, as much a place of pilgrimages as was the Germany of Albrecht Dürer, whose mother rented a stand at the Nuremberg fair to sell her son's woodcuts by the sheet. In Mexico whole villages empty themselves at pilgrimage time to go pray to a miraculous image or statue of its devotion. The church or chapel is built on the very same spot where pagan pilgrims, direct ancestors of those of today, had paid similar homage to their gods or godlings. These had been fierce ones, taking pleasure in piling up hardships to test their devotees, either by perching their eyries at the tiptop of peaks or burrowing in the blackness of caves. Roads, if roads they were, tended to the vertical, impassable unless it be in sandaled feet or on mule back. Pilgrimage sheets, these bundles seen so neatly packed in the Vanegas Arroyo pressroom, would reach each shrine ahead of the pilgrims, carried for the last stage of their journey in saddlebags or on human backs.

Pilgrims prayed first, then bought. The virtue of the image was in direct ratio to its faithfulness to the original. On the spot peddlers, the least and last



Posada's rendering of the customer's entrance to the Vanegas Arroyo shop. Relief etching. Jean Charlot Collection.

link in Vanegas Arroyo's country business, further enticed the pilgrim's pennies out of his knotted kerchief by selling, together with the printed sheet, *medidas*, ribbons of varied lengths cut to exact size, so swore the seller, by actual contact with the miraculous object.

Pilgrimages, basically motivated by pious zeal, never remain strict church matters. Between a pilgrimage and a kermess, the line is indeed of the thinnest, as self-scourging and mass reveling alternate. Liturgical dances resound in the nave of the church. Scaffolds scattered along the edge of the plaza that fronts the shrine are erected and mystery plays staged.

The lone anthropologist who tries against noisy odds to tape the lines glibly exchanged between man, archangel, and demon would do better to go to the source, the much soiled, much thumbed printed script of the play, a booklet of minute format bearing the imprint of the firm of Vanegas Arroyo.

In the drawing of the salesroom, besides the two customers waited upon by Mrs. Vanegas Arroyo, a flock of *papeleros*, with frayed straw hats and minimal clothing, are rushing out, each with a load of printed matter. Though drawn true to life, the urchins also stand as symbols, as did the packaged pilgrimage sheets piled up in the pressroom. Mexico City loomed large in the Vanegas Arroyo balance sheets, and the *papeleros*, unofficial employees of the firm, considered all the city streets their domain.

One late evening in the 1940s in the inner recesses of his shop I watched Don Blas, son of Don Antonio and by then head of the firm, apportioning by the light of a single candle his brittle wares to a flock of *papeleros* as crumbs to sparrows. With nimble fingers he sorted the frail sheets with astonishing speed.

"For you one hundred Guadalupe. And for you fifty Santo Niños—the one in the velvet Fauntleroy suit—and for you two hundred Virgins of the Rebozo." Solferino, magenta, yellow, off-white, the frail sheets changed hands as heaps of small coins, most centavos, piled up on the counter.

The capital was also best posted to relay political news, its lightning unpredictability a dramatic addition to the soothing calendar of saints' days and patriotic anniversaries of which Don Blas was kind enough to list for me a tentative perpetual calendar:

New Year's Day	Prayer and thanks to the Supreme Being
January 6	Feast of the three kings
February 2	Oration and praise of the Virgin of the Candelaria
Lent	The seven utterances of Jesus on the Cross Condolences to the Virgin of the Seven Dolors Praises of the Virgin of Solitude
May 5	Patriotic pennysheet
July 13	Prayers and praise to Saint Anthony of Padua, revered in Calpulalpam Leave-taking from same
August 15	Leave-taking and praise to Mary on her Assumption
September 8	Leave-taking, good morning, prayer, praise, and miracles of the Virgin of Remedies, venerated in her sanctuary of Cholula
September 16	Mexican National Hymn, commemoration of the Dolores uprising, and poem to the flag
October	Leave-taking, salutations, and praise of Our Lord of the Three Falls, revered in Jalacingo, State of Vera Cruz
October 12	Prayers, praise, visits, and good mornings to the Virgin of Guadalupe
November 1	Calaveras, or skulls, for the Day of the Dead
December 16 to 24	Pilgrims and posadas, Mary and Joseph in search of an inn

As the revolution neared, political news swelled. So brittle proved to be the life thread of the men involved that, no sooner had one of them risen to eminence than Don Antonio would set in type a death notice and Posada portray him as a calavera, all bones and no flesh. It proved a shrewd move. Flocks of papeleros would fan out of the Vanegas Arroyo shop and cover the city, hawking the red-hot extra at the very moment that the more reputable newspapers busied themselves at typesetting the same event.

POSADA, ENGRAVER

How the Mexican loves art, sighs the tourist, noticing that in Mexico City subway stations are defined not only by name but also by a coat of arms of heraldic design. In a way, the tourist is right—the love of art is there. But also there is an awareness on the part of the subway planner that illiteracy is the

lot of many commuters, an illiteracy never to be confused with a lack of culture. The Latin alphabet in any one of its combinations leaves unmoved the half million plateau Indians whose tongue is Nahuatl and whose script remains pictographs. The drawing of a *chapulin*, the grasshopper, stood for Chapultepec long before Emperor Moctezuma created there a zoo. In a similar vein, the favorite themes of today's penny sheets are latent in Aztec Mexico. A scaffold piled high with dried skulls was a sacred feature of the temple. Penny sheets pick up the theme. The human sacrifice performed on top of the Pyramid of the Sun, the victim tumbling all the way down the steep steps—such sights are now obsolete. But how a publisher of penny sheets pines for the corrido's jackpot, the matador casually tossed about by the bull, blood mixing on his traje de luces with the gold and silver and sequins. Death in the afternoon remains a sure seller.

To size Posada's true worth one needs to shake off preconceived ideas of what popular art is. The most seriously researched group of graphic folk art, the *images d'Epinal*, has tinted and to an extent tainted this preconception. Born French, François Georquin, Epinal's major engraver, favors Gallic turns of mind that lack a counterpart in Guadalupe Posada's art. Georquin's fairy book version of Napoleon's *épopée* is mock heroic and bloodless, its stenciled palette fresh as a nosegay. Crunching bone against bone, Posada's Dance of Death, by dribbling scarlet over black and white, evokes darker memories: the Mayan supplicant piercing his tongue with maguey spikes, fresh welts on the naked back of the masked flagellant.

Georquin and Posada may both illustrate the identical folksy skit and there is still a difference. Georquin's gang of old maids, ax solidly in hand, fell a tree on whose branches the men they pine for perch. Having attempted rod fishing and lassoing with no luck, the Mexican spinsters fall to their knees, eyes rolling heavenward, "Saint Anthony pray, a miracle. Ensnare for me a goodly husband!" Gallic balance would frown on this celestial kibitzing. Hispanic mysticism can hardly wait to relocate the lowbrow comedy on the vertically tiered stage of a mystery play.

If the treatment of identical subject matter diverges according to race and country, more subtle still are the ties between the climate of an artist's life and the evolution of his style. Such a study is expected as concerns Old Masters. Is it equally valid in regard to a true folk artist? Is the fellow as delicately wrought as, let us say, a Titian, for whom Emperor Charles V picked up, spine humbly bent the brush the Master had just dropped. Are not folks a simpler breed and their lives all of a piece?

On study, not so. There is not one Posada, a monolithic one that may be summed up in a single print—for an Anglo perhaps a calavera. There are instead dissimilar Posadas. Leaving aside as juvenilia the stones grained and drawn in Aguascalientes, there is the gentle style he practiced in León de las Aldamas, pen lithographs impeccably drawn with the thinnest of lines, its tendrils flowing as easily as script. Or another Posada, one newly arrived in the capital, striving to forget the too-much that he knew so as to match the uncouth naïveté of his colleagues, the Manillas. Next, after the Manillas faded out, a liberated Posada asserting himself with a macho line that calls for a new technique, that of relief etching. He does not hesitate to juggle either with scale or perspective to underline his meaning. In a dyptich published in a labor weekly, *La Guacamaya*, Posada portrays Francisco I. Madero before and after his victory over Don

Porfirio Díaz. The Madero of 1910 barely reaches other men to knee height. The Madero of 1911, the presidency within grasp, towers over a dwarf crowd.

Posada at times deflected his style to meet outside events. Come a new century, draftsmen gave place to cameramen to illustrate the news, posed family groups hung in even the humblest homes. Vanegas Arroyo's plebeian customers were learning to see the world as the black box sees it. Posada's use of medieval formulas based on a symbolism of forms came to be frowned upon. For a while he gave in to the new fashion. To some of his bullfight scenes, indeed lacking the clarity of earlier ones, he adds to his name the name and address of the commercial studio on whose photograph his engraving is based. An extreme example of this bastard genre refers to an attempt against President Díaz's life. The cameraman must have posted himself on the azotea of a neighboring building and gotten his shot by luck. Posada patiently copies what the camera saw in plunging perspective, sombreros and a few top hats, a streetcar, two nags harnessed to a cab, and, towering plumb center in the foreground, an impassible telegraph pole stretching its lines over the melee in a web of diagonals. Under this disorganized tableau runs the proud caption, "Copy of a magnificent engraving published in *El Mundo Ilustrado*." As a total surrender to the mechanical eye, this plate remains, happily enough, an exception.

STATES

Prints are the one art medium to leave a physical record of the steps involved in the creative process. Set side by side, successive trial proofs may deepen our understanding of the *modus operandi* of the artist.

In the case of Posada, to compare states may, on this ground, lead to disappointment. True, the relevant material is unusually copious, with the bulk of the original plates not as yet dispersed. Most of them went through modifications at times drastic, but only rarely for aesthetic reasons. However, one gains a strong feeling of how the master engraver when at work was harassed by the requirements of headlines and deadlines. Two typical examples follow.

La Gazetta Callejera, or Street Gazette, Don Antonio's own newspaper, was hardly a time-conscious periodical. Gazette no. 7 is dated May 8, 1893. At noon that same day Gen. Manuel González, who had been president of the republic a short while, courtesy of his crony Gen. Porfirio Díaz, died at his country estate, the Hacienda of Chapingo. The Gazette announcing his death features an important Posada cut. The general lies for public viewing, his well-groomed corpse dressed in full uniform, with an eagle, the national symbol, perched on his plumed hat. The curtains of the deathbed open onto a black void suggestive of the nether regions.

What followed proved well worth an extra of the Gazette. On May 11, brought from the hacienda to the capital, the corpse was to receive a most public and pompous burial. For the publisher May 10 became the deadline. Time was too short for Posada to compose and cut another plate of similar importance. Don Antonio was in a quandary!

Published May 10, the second state of the plate first published May 8 displays—issuing out of the folds of the right curtain—a Lilliputian funerary cortege, its hearse dragged by plumed horses followed by well-fed mourners. The vision crosses the width of the image and fades out into the folds of the left

MEXICO MAYO 8 DE 1893.

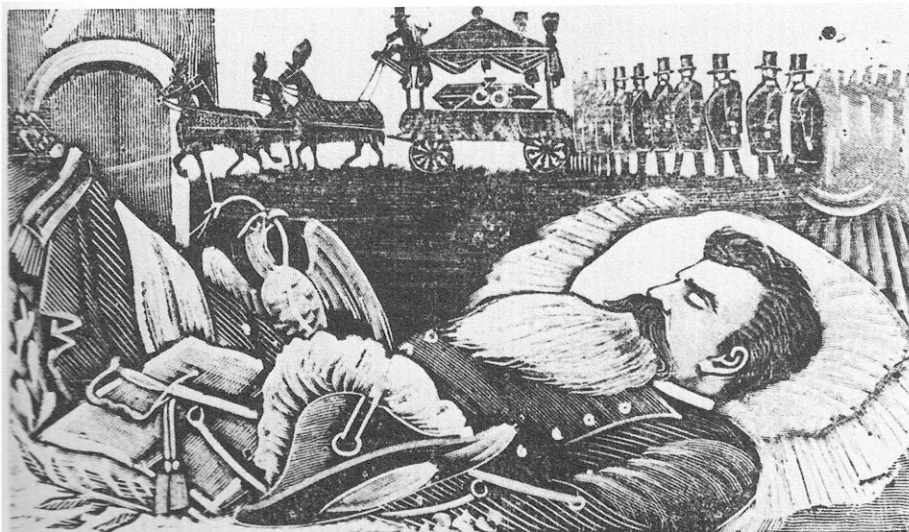
NUM. 7.

GACETA CALLEJERA.

Esta hoja volante se publicará cuando los acontecimientos de sensación lo requieran.



Muerte del General Manuel González, en la Hacienda de Chapingo el día 8 de Mayo de 1893, á las 12 v 38 minutos del día.



Muerte del General Manuel González, en la Hacienda de Chapingo el día 8 de mayo de 1893, á las 12 v 38 minutos del día. First state. Metal cut by Posada from the *Gaceta Callejera*, May 8, 1893. Jean Charlot Collection.

Llegada del cadaver del C. General Manuel González a esta capital. Second state. Metal cut by Posada from the *Gaceta Callejera*, May 10, 1893. Jean Charlot Collection.

curtain. Thus, spurred by the profit motive of his employer, Posada did his best, his admirable best, transforming a routine report into an ectoplasmic dream.

A second example. One of Posada's prints most often reproduced portrays the entry of Francisco I. Madero into Mexico City on June 7, 1911. The print is a favorite as it fits closely a preconceived idea of what folk prints should look like. The scale is unrealistic, each personage of a size attesting to his importance or the lack of it. The three-quarter perspective of the official vehicle reminds one of the cutouts that children fold on the dotted line to make them appear three dimensional. The applauding crowd, which the newspapers that day estimated at one hundred thousand, is condensed into a handful of spectators. Though they line the foreground they remain much smaller than the future president and his lady, who bow from the middle ground. Smallest of all, humblest of all, the two coachmen uneasily perch high on what we shall cautiously refer to as the presidential vehicle.

As we have seen in the preceding example, in the matter of official entries, be they funerary or triumphal, a must for the publisher is that his paper should hit the street on the day of the event, to be sold to the gawking, milling crowd. During the centennial celebrations one year earlier, it was not unusual to watch the state landau, its white gloved coachman, whip in hand, gathering in the other the reins of a matched pair of horses with, seated at his side, arms crossed, the valet whose special duty was to fold and unfold the steps that allowed the VIP of the day to ascend and descend from the carriage. In 1910, this landau had carried a motley crew of visitors, from ambassadors in plumed hats to Chinese gowned in silk.

Other times, other manners—or so did Don Antonio believe. To fit the revolutionary Madero, Don Porfirio's vehicle could hardly do. More symbolic by far of the new order would be an automobile. The hitch was that, though well versed in landaus, Posada remained somewhat hazy as to automobiles.

A close look at the print, seemingly so naïve and easy, uncovers proofs of a major remaniement, doubtless hurriedly realized to meet the pressing deadline. The acid-bit metal was, in its first state, little used if at all. Not a single proof of it has survived. Soon after completion the plaque was sawed into three pieces and these joined differently to create a corrected image. The penny sheets hawked in the streets the day of the presidential entry use that second state exclusively.

In the first state, as reconstructed here, the coachmen sat imposingly high. Impeccably attired, they are the same men that were, before the revolution, trusted with the official landau. They sit on what could be construed as the radiator of an unorthodox automobile. In the second state, the well-aligned crowd of the first state has been wrenched in two fragments, with one of the hatted ladies displaced to the upper edge of the print, resolutely turning her back on Madero.

What weighty reason might justify these puzzling changes? Did it start with a chance remark by someone in the know that a chauffeur, unlike a coachman, sits on the same level as his VIPs? If so, Don Antonio's scruple concerning accuracy and the resulting labor of cutting and joining anew the plate proved in vain. When on June 7, 1911, Madero and his lady drove into the capital they sat in the Díaz state landau, drawn by a well-matched pair of white horses.



Como fué la entrada del Sr. Madero a Mexico (Madero's Entry), by Posada. Second state, published. Jean Charlot Collection.

First state, reconstructed, of Madero's Entry.



José Guadalupe Posada en su taller de la calle de Santa Iñez, ciudad de México, año de 1904.
Wash drawing by Manuel Rivera Regalado. *Jean Charlot Collection.*

FOES AND FRIENDS

Posada's workshop, meaning the recess where he kept and manned his lithographic press, opened directly onto the street, a close neighbor to that august institution the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, chartered in 1785. It became the Imperial Academy under Antonio López de Santa Anna, the National Academy under Juárez, and again Imperial under Maximilian. Professors imported from Europe outranked in pay and prestige even the best of local masters.

The 1910 revolution hardly shook such aristocratic aloofness. Students however, feeling the swirl of political winds, rebelled. Their first target happened to be Don Daniel Vergara Lope, the professor of anatomy. Not without cause his students objected to his dictatorial manners. The archives of the academy have preserved some of his opinions, plumb out of place as a new freedom dawned. His students, said he, were "beetles, illiterates, effeminate, and starvelings." The occasion for such an outburst was a petition presented to the director: "The students beg the director to ask that the anatomy teacher teach, instead of selling them translations in loose sheets, after the manner of the folk ballads of Vanegas Arroyo." Indeed a plebeian blot on the academic scutcheon.

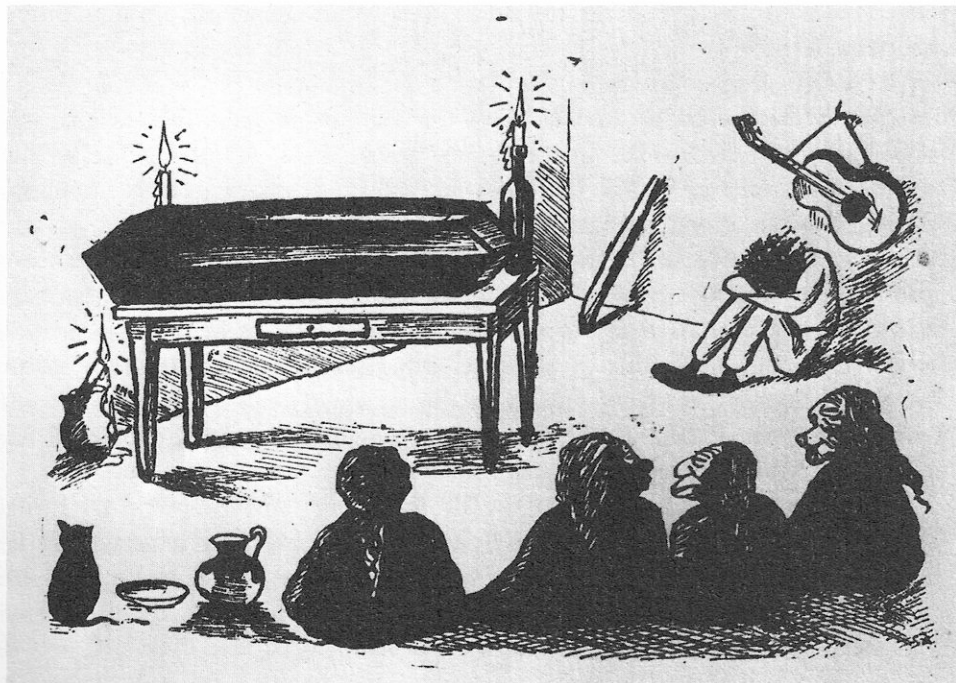
Not all students, however, were of this same mind. A majority, it is true, despised Posada's workshop, its facade painted gaudily the better to proclaim his wares. However there were exceptions. Don Antonio, if a pressing task arose

and Posada was otherwise employed, sought a substitute among the young artists of the academy. One of these was Manuel Rivera Regalado, who was kind enough to share with me the memories of his youth. He even drew a skillful pen-and-wash of Posada as he remembered him about 1904 in the workshop of Santa Inez. In shirtsleeves and a leather apron the sturdy master peers through a magnifying glass at the small block he carves. A brass spittoon is set at his right and shavings of wood and metal are strewn about the floor. Regalado's caption: "This scene is specially drawn for my friend and countryman Jean Charlot. It brings back memories of the moments of great admiration and deep respect that I felt for Posada in my student days at the Academy of San Carlos."

The young José Clemente Orozco was another dissenting student. He detoured from classes to pay visits to the penny sheet journeyman, usually catching him, burin in hand, cutting designs on boxwood or type metal. Orozco would shyly pocket some of the shavings that carpeted the floor. Were they to him some sort of antidote against teachers overeager to prune his precocious genius?

When he received his first mural commission Orozco was already in his mid-forties. Before that he was much appreciated as a cartoonist. Though, as we have seen, he respected Posada, there is of course no intent to present these early works of Orozco as under his influence. Both men simply adapted themselves to national attitudes. Mexico has a strong tradition of political cartoons, backed by the disinterestedness of men who have gone to jail, had their presses smashed, their skulls bashed, and their papers suppressed, all for the sake of keeping an opposition alive. Their role was crucial. When official art tended to freeze into decorum, they alone kept intact the quota of dynamism and unnicety without which Mexican art would quickly wither.

Posada painted circus posters and street murals. Orozco shied away from performing similarly odd jobs only after international fame had caught up with him. Thanks to José Juan Tablada, the Mexican critic who wrote in 1916 the first



Death Watch, by José Clemente Orozco. Cartoon, pulled by hand from linecut, ca. 1923. *Jean Charlot Collection.*

published interview with the artist, we may at least visualize one of these low-brow masterpieces, never meant to enter a museum and that Orozco would forcefully disown in his maturity:

A very representative work of Orozco is to be found in one of the more characteristically Mexican places in Mexico City, a coffeehouse, a rendezvous for painters and literary men called *Los Monotes*, a term that has something of the meaning of "big puppets." . . . Along the four walls of the hall, veiled by an atmosphere charged with tobacco smoke and stimulating odors of spicy Mexican cookery, runs a frieze in which the personages of Orozco act and dance in a frenzy of movement and expression—"Follies," girls flirting with old beaux, couples adventuring in old-fashioned hackney coaches, policemen as passive as timekeepers at prizefights, and, as a leitmotiv, the reckless and alluring girl of the city . . . with makeup and elaborate headdress. . . . [These figures are] painted on cardboard, cut out and pasted on the wall—.

While President Madero strengthened among the poor folks their faith in the revolution, vested interests fought Madero literally to death, his death. Orozco's savage anti-Madero cartoons of the 1910s backed the conservatives but meant little more than that, whosoever would be at the top, Orozco would be "against it." In the early 1920s not yet a muralist, he published in *El Machete* the last and most forceful of his political cartoons. *El Machete* was left of the left, the early muralists' own paper. As soon as Orozco saw the danger of being counted as one of that flock, or of any other flock, he switched for a time to episodes of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi!

IMMEDIATE SUCCESSORS (1910s)

As mentioned before, toward the end of his life Posada could very well believe that, Madero being president, the revolution would taper off. Events proved otherwise.

Less than three weeks after the artist's death, a major phase of the struggle brought to the streets of Mexico City the very same frightfulness that had raked the provinces. In history, February 9–19, 1913, is fittingly known as *la Decena Trágica*, the Tragic Ten Days. It meant much hard work for publisher Vanegas Arroyo. From bombastic his style changed to terse and factual, so saturated was the news itself with blood and thunder. Artillery duels left so many dead lying in the streets that to avoid a plague they were doused with petrol and burned. The painter Alfredo Zalce remembers how as a child he was once late for school, having knelt long by a corpse, entranced by the erratic course of the flies on its features, the only motion in this otherwise motionless street scene. To entice his customers, however, Don Antonio still needed the additional lure of an image, and his image maker was gone.

The firm owned the bulk of Posada's engravings and the publisher turned to them. From internal evidence the first extra to be released within these ten days came out February 11. It featured a Posada cut: a squad of mounted police, naked sabers in hand, charge at a gallop into the thick of an unarmed plebeian crowd. No such episode is alluded to in the accompanying text. The lack of a tie between text and picture is explainable. Hurriedly shuffling through his pile of

Posadas, Don Antonio had picked a block cut some twenty years before to illustrate one of the Street Gazettes. Dated 1892, it describes the brutal quelling of a meeting protesting one of the many Díaz reelections.

One more hurdle. The 1892 Gazette is of large format and the image spreads over its full width. The 1913 news sheet is half that size. So the block was sawed in two and only its left fragment reused. Don Antonio was a true professional, and in his craft journalistic deadlines held priority. Many of the remaining original blocks, both wood and metal, have been thus sawed, quartered, or otherwise mutilated when format or details failed to fit a new context. In some cases the deed is posthumous. In others Posada may well be the guilty one, for he cared as little for the opinion of posterity as Don Antonio himself.

During these ten fateful days Vanegas Arroyo issued two more single sheets I know of. There is an undeniable poignancy in their strict contemporaneity. The first concludes, "Most federal buildings remain in the hands of troops loyal to the government." The second, "It appears that government forces are deeply demoralized." Both sheets reuse obsolete Posadas. Both feature guns in allusion to Gen. Felix Mondragon, an artilleryman who had engineered the coup and who also was the inventor of an advanced type of gun adopted by the French army and used throughout the First World War.

On February 18, Gen. Victoriano Huerta, then in charge of federal defense, turned coat and named himself president. Madero was put under arrest together with his vice president, Pino Suárez. Both were murdered February 22.

Don Antonio, witnessing the surge of new names and new events, realized how he could not rely much longer on makeshift solutions. A transitional move was to replace hand-carved cuts by photographic halftones. However, whereas the blunt simplicity of Posada and the Manillas was crafted to withstand cheap colored paper and erratic pressure, the halftone, whose sales appeal at its best would have been weak, thus mistreated lost it altogether.

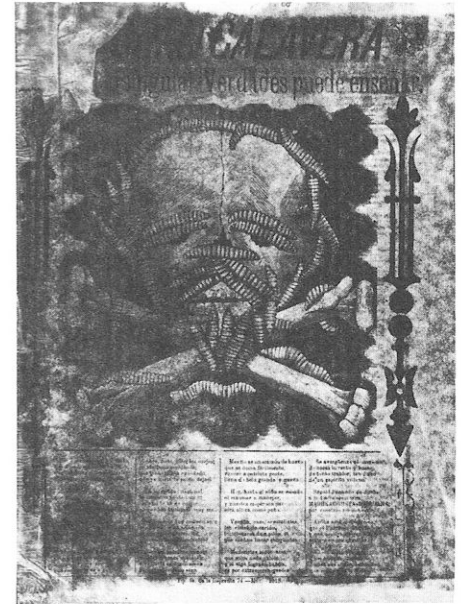
A large calavera ushers in Posada's first human successor. Dated 1913, it could only have been released after Madero's arrest and assassination became known. Posada's calaveras had echoed a wide range of feelings, from comical to tragic, and finer nuances as well. The one that portrays Don Porfirio starting for exile is expressive of noble pity. Posada's anonymous successor lacks finesse. He constructs a mask of Madero with worms as building units. If he fails to fully achieve the horror he sought it is because of the insecurity of his burin work. The text uses slogans meant to strengthen the new regime. President Huerta pledges himself to bring back the peace and order so long enjoyed under this great hero, Don Porfirio Díaz. Political dissenters are reviled:

Venal pro-Madero valets
 Who cloaked yourselves with shame,
 Leaving for only monument
 Lawless deeds of anarchy

Drawing and text were conceived as one:

Their skulls will be receptacles for worms
 Like the one you contemplate here.

Had Don Antonio turned ultraconservative? Or, well aware of the ferociousness with which Huerta enforced his own interpretation of law and order, did



La gran calavera estecían o singular—verdades puede enseñar (Madero Calavera). Type-metal engraving by an unknown artist, 1913, showing a calavera of Francisco I. Madero. *Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.*

Zapata Calavera, possibly by the "Master of the worm-eaten skull" who did the *Madero Calavera*. *Jean Charlot Collection.*



Huerta As Spider, by an unknown artist. *Jean Charlot Collection.*



the thought of presses smashed—and printers' skulls as well—excuse the deed as a plea for survival?

Overpowered from all sides by rival chieftains, Huerta's regime did not last long. He resigned July 15, 1914, and fled to the United States. Backed by his faithful Yaqui Indian hordes, General Alvaro Obregon took possession of the capital in the name of Venustiano Carranza, self-styled first chief of the revolution. Huerta was to die in El Paso, Texas, in January 1916.

Engravings whose subject matter ties in with events after Posada's death, even when reminiscent of his style, cannot be from his hand. It is also plausible that the anonymous "Master of the worm-eaten skull" worked more than this once for Vanegas Arroyo. He may be the author of an equally nightmarish image, a calavera of Victoriano Huerta metamorphosed into a giant spider, often spoken of as cut by Posada. This violently anti-Huerta sheet could not have been published earlier than July 15, 1914, the date of Huerta's resignation. Soon after ascending to power the Carranza party publicized a search that proved successful for the hastily dug graves of Huerta's political rivals who had disappeared while he was president. A photograph circulated showing President Madero's shirt and coat, with bullet holes proving that he had been shot from the back. This could be a possible inspiration for the spider image.

THE MURALISTS AS GRAPHIC ARTISTS (1920s)

The mural movement, now accepted as a major value index to the art renaissance of the 1920s, was in no way art for art's sake or murals for murals' sake. José Vasconcelos, a major philosopher, secretary of education under President Obregon, had published in New York when a political exile a study on Pythagoras that may be considered a blueprint of what he planned to achieve on his return to political power.

In the United States, the vaunted value of numbers, be they statistics or dollars, failed to impress Vasconcelos as pertaining to a complex thinking order. The key to the kind of superior culture he wished to implant in his Mexico is subtly suggested by the following classical anecdote: it is said of Pythagoras that he thought at his best when his neighbor, the smith, made "music" at his forge, hammering iron bars into horseshoes or armor. Noisy though it was, the resulting rhythm did not rely on numbers. It embodied imponderables, the motions of the artisan at his task, his mood, his joy, his strength, his fatigue. Likewise, the rhythmic beauty we call art.

Art, concluded Vasconcelos, was the lever with which he would lift his patria beyond even the range of that stolid culture of the northern neighbor, whose lodestar remained numbers.

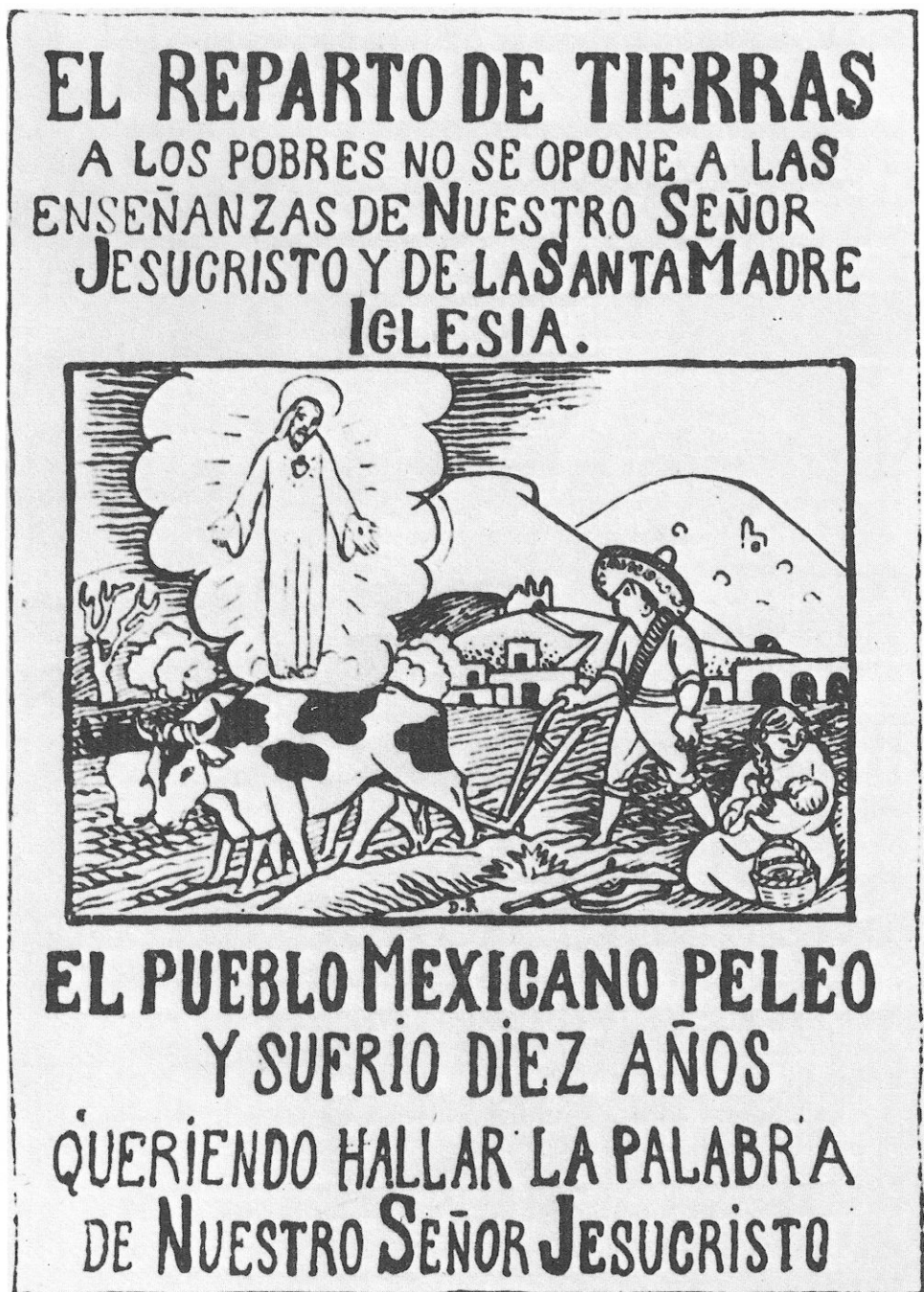
In those days, about 1911, the northern neighbor eyed Mexico as an eyrie of lawless bandidos. Time elapsed, and it is pleasant to note how the implausible happened. The philosopher, sharing his musings with a handful of artists, deeply modified the bandido image into one of recognized beauty.

Vasconcelos appreciated art as a means to an end. Only by exposing the people at large to art's influence would the alchemistic formula transmute them into gold. Two such encounters were worked out. Murals in public buildings could not fail to impose themselves upon the attention of the crowds. Less novel but tried and found effective, penny sheets and street gazettes would bring art inside humble homes. With metaphysical ease the secretary had equated two abstractions, art and beauty, without haggling about what shape they would eventually take.

Still, he was distraught when "his" muralists chose to work in a didactic mode, telling stories as elaborate as those that Giotto had frescoed in the 1300s. Penny sheets and street gazettes also renewed their skin, bruising in their turn Vasconcelos's ego. Spain, in his view, had helped Mexico to a choice culture. Contrariwise, the artists filled pamphlets and walls alike with a paeon of praise for pre-Hispanic achievements.

The goodwill of the artists was never in doubt. Diego Rivera illustrated reading primers and political tracts in a style as simplified as ABC. His loose sheet urging the parceling of agricultural lands remains a small masterpiece of clear elocution. He had come a long way since his Parisian cubist days, when, closeted with Gleize and Severini, together they plumbed the depths of a fourth dimension.²

2. "As the painter Rivera, following Poincaré, justly observed, 'A being living in a world with varied refractions instead of homogeneous ones would be bound to conceive of a fourth dimension.' This milieu with distinct refractions is realized in a picture if a multiplicity of pyramids replaces the single cone of Italian perspective. Such is the case with certain personal experiments made by Rivera, who sees in Poincaré's hypothesis a confirmation of some intuitions of Rembrandt, El Greco and Cézanne." Gino Severini, "La Peinture d'Avant-garde," *Mercur de France*, June 1, 1917, pp. 451-68, 462f.



El reparto de tierras, by Diego Rivera. Penny sheet, ca. 1922.
Jean Charlot Collection.

The graphic climax of the mid-twenties is reached in *El Machete*, a street gazette of extra large format, irregularly issued. For it muralists Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero literally carved planks into raw woodcuts. These were inked and run together with the type, minus the niceties one associates with graphic art. Poor as the resulting proofs undeniably are, these few prints remain an authentic testimonial to a moment of heroic endeavor.

El Machete was named after the curved blade, half hunting knife and half scythe, that the peasant keeps close at hand at all times. Its masthead:

The machete is used to reap cane,
To clear a path through the underbrush,

To kill snakes, end strife,
And humble the pride of the impious rich.³

The gazette was financed, meagerly to be sure, by the Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors. To print it in two colors was sheer luxury for such a small budget. Graciela Amador, wife of Siqueiros, composed a Spartan ditty to help raise the needed sum:

El que quiere su rojo celeste,
Que le cueste.

Or,

For that heavenly red to stay,
Pay.

Content was on a par with form. *El Machete* no. 3 featured a woodcut by Siqueiros of a kneeling worker, arms tied behind his back, scourged, bleeding through an allover pattern of gashes, a Marxist version of the peculiarly Mexican Christ of Solitude whipped to the bare ribs, worshiped in many a village shrine. Its caption: "It is in this attitude, unarmed, kneeling, scourged, and imploring mercy that landowners, industrialists, oil men, and the wealthy wish to see the worker forever."

The better to contact the people, the muralists turned newspaper hawkers, papeleros. Siqueiros, ex-captain under General Dieguez, foe of Pancho Villa, dutifully walked the streets with his load of papers, a job that street urchins up to then had claimed by birthright.

Men in power were not spared. If the editorials and cartoons were even more scathing than usual there were underhand ways to still "sell" the paper. Reminisced Guerrero: "At four in the morning street lamps were extinguished and there remained a short span of time before the first stirrings of light. Then Siqueiros and I would sally forth, loaded with papers, brushes, and a pail of glue. In the dark we hurriedly pasted *El Machete* on strategic walls and retreated before dawn."

Eventually the painters found they could spare neither time nor money for the job. Shrunken in size, shorn of all aesthetic delight, *El Machete* somehow survived until 1938, filled with the no-nonsense reports of the orthodox Communist party.

Following the true and tried Vanegas Arroyo formula, a substantial feature of the early *Machete* was the corridos, doggerel poems and playlets on current topics. Follows a sample of the type of event that sparked its strictly plebeian muse.

Soon after the march on Rome, fascism thought of selling itself to the world as easily as it had to the Italian king. The ship *Italia* was rigged and sent on a world errand, crammed with a cultural cargo that ranged from World War I tanks to artists and their art. Specifically infuriating for the muralists was the elite list of painters and sculptors, among them Giulio Aristides Sartorio, the painter of

3. El machete sirve para cortar la caña,
para abrir las veredas en los bosques umbríos,
decapitar culebras, tronchar toda cizaña
y humiliar la soberbia de los ricos impíos.



The Flogged Worker, by David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Jean Charlot Collection.*

Prelude to Spring, Evening on a Roman Country Side, and so on. Leonardo Bistolfi, dubbed "the sculptor of thought," had been shipped together with his marbles, *The Spirit of Youth at the Tomb of the Young Poet, Sorrow Comforted by Memories*, and others.

Here was an issue that scrambled politics and art to perfection. An extra of the gazette was hurriedly put together, including a long satirical ode from which I quote:

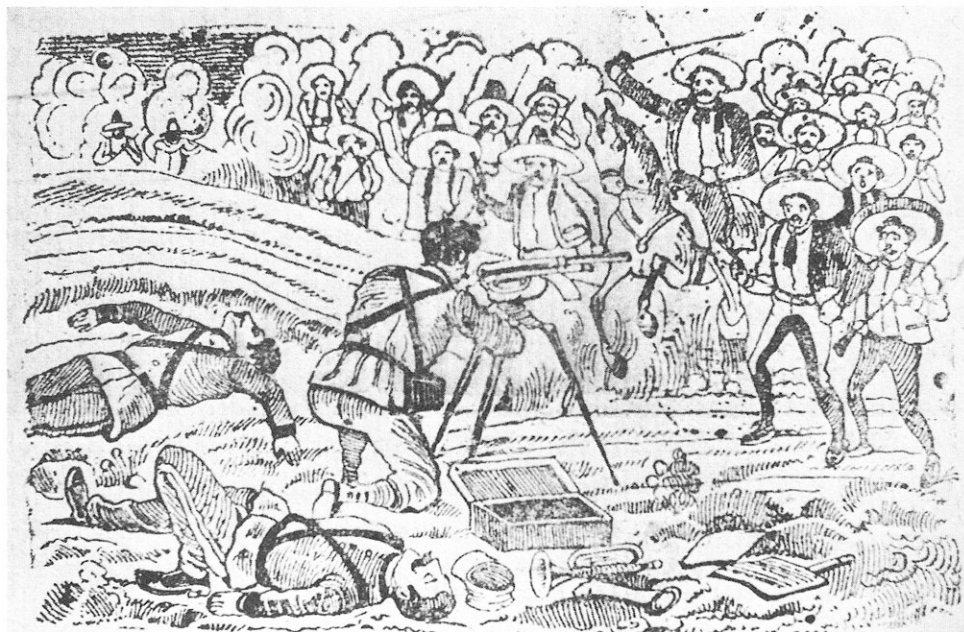
Remember, Pipi, those halls so rich
 Jammed with statues and pictures . . .
 Indeed, deary, the Bistolfis
 Glazed with tears my sight.
 My joy bubbled and fizzed
 To see those nudes throbbing and white.
 Of Sartorio the genial output
 Pleased me most of the varied fare.
 It shames the monkeys rolled in soot
 That our local daubers call fair!

Granted that the main issues are by now quite stale, how tragic this proof that the muralists were fully aware of the savage reaction of the bourgeois mind to their very first murals.

Lightning struck at the end of an official state supper. As the gay clanking of spoons over ice cream dishes gave way to the numbness that heralds speeches, members of the Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors let fly from the high windows of the dining hall a hail of black, red and white *Machetes* that fluttered and scattered impartially over both hosts and guests.

Thus, dreamed by a philosopher borrowing his wisdom from a Greek sage, the fusion of art and the people acquired a pungent flavor of *Mexicanidad*, using the very means and the very language the readers of the corridos of Vanegas Arroyo relished. But what of Posada, specifically?

Desde 1910 a la fecha, el pueblo los ha veneido varias veces, by Posada. From *El Machete*, August 9, 1924. Hemeroteca Nacional, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.



El Machete for August 1924 prints from the original Posada block an ambush of Federals by Zapatistas. Unlike most Posada blocks it is unsigned. I give the accompanying text in its totality, mostly for what it fails to say:

[Title:] Government hired guards are not the Invincibles. Since 1910, the People have defeated them many times. [Caption:] The engraving here published dates from the early days of the Revolution and represents revolutionary "hordes" destroying the unbeatable Federal troops whose officers were trained in European military academies. May the military men of today never renege on their revolutionary origins to become in their turn bodyguards to the present government, or they will suffer the same fate.

Thus a decade after his death, though his engravings were ceaselessly reprinted, Posada's name was forgotten. At that time it seemed as if anonymity would be for him a very special sort of apotheosis. Guadalupe Posada was not just a man anymore, but the Voice of his People!

WORKSHOP FOR POPULAR GRAPHIC ARTS (1930s)

To be valid, a search for the successors of Posada differs from a listing of the followers of a Giorgione or a Seurat. Similarities of style and subject matter are not enough. A deeper affinity is the relationship between a graphic artist and the Mexico that surrounds him and his generation, doubtless different from the brutal avalanche of events mirrored in the engravings of Posada's later years. Relevant are even negative doings, as when the master unhesitatingly sawed, quartered, and mutilated his own original blocks to ease the task of a pressman or adjust to up-to-date news, an act that makes clear the dominant quota of artisanship Posada's art did submit to. A true disciple will show an equally humble attention to the Mexico that proposes itself to him and changes unpredictably with each artistic generation.

In the mid-1920s, to publish *El Machete* had proved a lonely task. Hated by conservatives, disdained by men in power just moved from leather saddles to cushioned executive posts, it irritated as well orthodox Communists, aware that Stalin's jacket of strict military cut repelled artists who leaned naturally to Trotsky's scraggly beard and unbuttoned attire.

Things were quite otherwise when the workshop for graphic arts came into being in 1937. President Lázaro Cárdenas was a man of good faith, sworn to implement the goals so much talked of, so much fought for, of the past revolution: education, repartition of farm lands, expropriation of foreign oil interests. The newly created graphic workshop, eager to help, took it upon itself to act as image maker to the government. Pamphlets, penny sheets, portfolios—each played its role in a planning that was both vast enough to embrace a nation and minute enough that, however isolated, no Indian minority group was slighted. When World War II loomed imminent, it added as targets three puppet-figure, international dictators that no image maker could resist: Mussolini, Hitler, Franco.

Early each day the anteroom of the presidential office was filled with villagers in white calconcillos, conical sombrero in hand, undyed sarape at the shoulder, come from remote corners of the map to tell the president of problems that loomed large inside their own tiny world. Rare was a refusal to see them, each and all. News photographs emphasize the incongruity of the setting for such rustic gathering, a Porfirio Díaz decor of contorted mirrors, satin uphol-



Carrousel, by Leopoldo Méndez. Woodcut. *Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.*

stery, a medley of Louis imported from Europe, never meant to know the smells of earth and straw.

The days when Vasconcelos planned to mold the people to his borrowed utopia were over. The supremacy accorded the tongue of the conquistadores became diluted by a sincere respect for live Indian idioms. Multilingual primers held a role similar to that of the pamphlets of Vanegas Arroyo. Their illustrators learned much that proved pertinent to their art from native informants come to the capital as advisers to the School of Anthropology. One morning one of them opened the class by telling us to stand up and observe five minutes of silence. We complied. What was the occasion? The anniversary of the hanging by Hernando Cortez of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtemotzin, to cut short the marks of deep respect shown to his prisoner by his subjects.

This same afternoon a petition in Nahuatl, the major Aztec tongue, reached the Mexican president, asking that the date be proclaimed an annual day of mourning throughout the nation.

Scripts for pilgrimage plays such as those Vanegas Arroyo had kept in stock since the nineteenth century did not rate high, but their mode of communication was kept intact though the substance of the new scripts underlined present-day needs. Hygiene, the three Rs, and a switch from tribal to national pride provided exciting plots for modified playlets. These plays were patterned after such

Vanegas Arroyo classics as "A Dialogue between a Tortilla Seller and a Mat Weaver in Praise of Our Lady of Remedios." State-sponsored puppeteers drove in a truck from village to village. As they unloaded their skimpy paraphernalia, villagers of all ages squatted around the rim of the rustic plaza in anticipation. It was a pleasure to see dour faces suddenly light up the moment the wooden actors spoke their lines in the very language their enthralled audience understood best.

First to think of setting up a collective graphic studio had been Alfredo Zalce, Pablo O'Higgins, Luis Arenal, and Leopoldo Méndez. Eventually seventeen others joined these four. Up to then the only member using graphics as his major medium was Méndez. To tighten the quality of the expanding organization he became director and administrator.

At the start, the only possession of the collective was a lithographic press of respectable vintage, hand-manned and sturdy enough to process antiquated large stones. Méndez and O'Higgins had spotted it among discards from the long-established "El Buen Tono" cigar factory where it had lain idle at least since the turn of the century. Doubtless before that it had helped produce such grandly gaudy chromolithographs as embellish Mexican cigar boxes and cigar bands.

As an added virtue in the eyes and heart of Leopoldo Méndez, ever aware of his twin duties as political activist and graphic artist, the press was cast stamped "Paris, 1871," and the date was enough to fan his belief that it had seen service with the *communards*, workers active in the short-lived and disastrous uprising known as the Paris Commune. As work started, the collective adopted the name Taller de Gráfica Popular (T.G.P.), Workshop for Popular Graphic Arts.

Collective realization had been a fact with Posada, depending for his subject matter on the news of the day and for his strictly unlimited editions on the business acumen of Don Antonio. As to the muralists, master mason and master painter climbed the scaffold in pairs.

The T.G.P. was first to take articulate pride in what previously all had taken for granted. The scope of the tasks brought to completion proved how the many did work as one: a portfolio of seventy-eight large linocuts by seventeen artists recounted the pictorial story of the revolution.

Méndez, hard worker that he was, expected a similar zeal from others. The specific relation of the group to Posada, a veteran in this most specialized field, is tersely acknowledged by Zalce: "As to Posada, we did follow his example, not by adopting his graphic style, but rather the means he used to reach the people, posters, single sheets, throwaways, illustrated primers, etc."

As the T.G.P. publications diversified and multiplied, the government gave grants that expanded their reach. Artists joined cultural missions, their sensitive graphics from life adding valid data to scientific reports, at times even irreplaceable ones as in the case of the Lacandons, a bush tribe on the edge of total extinction.

Modern Mexico was such that neither Don Antonio nor Posada would have felt at ease in it. Its growth spurred the T.G.P. to adapt what new means "progress" proposed. At the international UNESCO conference held in the capital in 1947, engravings by Méndez were enlarged to heights of some fifty feet and spread on the walls of the assembly hall. The hand puppets of the 1930s were discarded, replaced by a new sort of puppet play, animated graphics projected on a screen. Murals even, now rated high outside Mexico, were referred to by a



Man of the XXth Century, by Pablo O'Higgins. Lithograph. Jean Charlot Collection.

younger generation as "fixed frescoes." They should give way to transportable, transformable silk-screen prints of mural size, cheap enough to be bought by farmers and workers to decorate their union halls.

The collective pride was artisanal but, as individuals, some among the group happened to be great artists. They full well understood how quality paper, un-hurried proofing, time-consuming techniques, and even individually signed and numbered editions, though bearing various stigmas of art for art, art for the few, or a rich man's art, like crime eventually should out if they were each to express themselves at their finest.

The result is prints whose beauty strikes first the onlooker. Méndez's *Carousel*, a linocut; O'Higgins's *Man of the XXth Century*, a lithograph; and Zalce's portfolio *Estampas de Yucatan*, a set of polychrome etchings, justify the breach in the theoretical armor. Or was it breach? They gave of their Indian models a fully human, deeply respectful portrait rarely equaled when these same men and women are used as actors in a planned social scenario.

A U.S.A. RENAISSANCE (1960-70)

The spread of both forms of collective art, murals and graphics, beyond Mexico's frontiers could not be delayed long. Yet crossing the Rio Grande in no way meant leaving Mexican soil. For two centuries, up until the 1820s, in both California and New Mexico, Franciscan friars and their Indian converts erected adobe missions, sculpted bultos, and painted retablos. Today the so-called *santos* tour meandering through the Spanish-speaking settlements of New Mexico still offers in the making the very kind of archaic artisanal art that, in Mexico proper, withered. Witness *La Carreta de la Muerte*, rather than a sculpture a carpenter's masterwork: Death crowned, armed with bow and arrows, seated on a two-tiered throne on wheels, spreads its bitter savor over the procession of flagellants that it rules. However, those who are conscious of this faraway past are few.

Today crossing the Rio Grande involves on the part of the Mexican artist drastic readjustments. Pre-Hispanic culture recognized in art a virtue close to the magical. Hispanic art is tied as narrowly to religion as Greek and Russian icons are. In the 1920s, in the midst of a national turmoil, the channeling of commissions remained traditional, with José Vasconcelos, secretary of education, acting as would an archbishop or viceroy. The Mexican artists, equally imbued with a sense of mission, accepted salaries hardly different from those of the master mason who troweled their walls or the pressman who ran their revolutionary plaquettes or placards.

North of the border, things are otherwise. For an American artist born and raised in a "gringo" world, the art merchant is the man to deal with. Often one hears investment and salability mentioned as if they were the major *raison d'être* of art.

By the 1960s, having each groomed his own stable of artists, New York dealers tagged high prices on their works, so high that they implied that works of genius were for sale. These premature immortals were publicized as the "School of New York." Contracts kept them on a tight leash as, simple men that most were, they had not read the small type. Adding a tragically modish frill, a number of the best among the leashed artists committed suicide. Imposing retro-spectives would follow. Pitiless handling by the IRS of widows and orphans

raised scandals, which resulted in further sales. The art market grew definitely bullish.

At that very moment, clocked simultaneously and inaudibly throughout the scattered ghettos and slums of our typical American megalopolis—Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco—murals as numerous as they were crude mushroomed. Stylistic sources were familiar to all folks: superheroes, male and female, ads, comics, embattled titles and aggressive captions ballooning free. The first shock absorbed, reporters and art critics reacted not unkindly to this poor man's renaissance. It furnished them with an escape from the boredom oozing from dealers' art whose haughty atmosphere rejected such pigmy happenings as racial and social themes. Here, on the dilapidated walls of condemned buildings for all to see was displayed on a gigantic scale "raw art"—*art cru*—a term coined by a genuine Parisian master, Jean Dubuffet, but that no Parisian dared flaunt as bluntly as any one of these ethnic Americans.

U.S.A. street murals so obviously sprang from grass roots—and grass grows sparse in these black and brown neighborhoods—that politicians, moved from the heart more than they care to admit, openly defend this novel kind of free speech, as silent as it is thunderous, eloquent but never spilling into grandiloquence, so felt is its sincerity.

Wherever scaffolds rose and ladders were propped up, passersby gathered. Dubbed "walk-ins," they were invited without further ado to paint. A theme was sketchily defined for the group; brushes, pots of paint, and spray guns were handed around. Few were trained painters but few refused. Even warring motorcycle gangs, doffing their helmets, made peace, manfully turning from bullies into mural painters.

Onlookers, women and men, Chinese, blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, felt strangely moved as they recognized themselves in these heroically scaled figures painted by women and men, Chinese, blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, just like themselves. The earliest murals had a very short life, between the last brushstroke and the wreckers' arrival, their truck ready to swing its iron ball at the brick wall all knew beforehand was condemned.

Taunting nicknames coined upstairs in derision were proudly adopted: fence painting, fireplug painting, trashcan painting. Never before in the U.S.A. had dealers' art for the few been confronted so blatantly by art for the many, thus making inescapably obvious the unbridgeable chasm between Lazarus and Mammon. Disquietingly, art for the many held its own. The key to that puzzle is a recently coined term, *the third world*. It marks the U.S.A.'s belated acceptance of ethnic and cultural splinters that enrich immensely the all over human wealth of our national image. John Weber sums up: the street movement put the embarrassed avant-garde (i.e., dealers' art) on the defensive; "the avant-garde had become the academy."⁴

Blacks head the list for pioneering and boldness, though Chicanos, justly proud of their Mexican roots, will help us follow right to our present day the spoor of the art of Guadalupe Posada as it spreads outside the borders of the Mexico he never left.

Chicanos choose with great care the titles of their murals and graphics to

4. Eva Cockcroft, John Weber, and Jim Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), p. 20.



Calavera Chicana. Detail from the poster *José Montoya's Pachuco Art—A Historical Update*. Photosilkscreen. José Montoya, designer; Rudy Cuellar and Louie the Foot, printers, 1978.

express the contemporaneity and the urgency of the social and ethnic problems of the land they now live in. With a tint of nostalgia they follow the lead of Don Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, who matched his captions to the robust Posada graphics by coining a Spanish rich in *mexicanismos*, tongue twisters to the Anglo-American.

Born of circumstances, a unique source of inspiration feeds their art. Youthful groups gather around their elders as they tell tales from the old country. Young men drink in the heroism of old men who plowed their small furrow in the revolution. The liberated Chicano woman marvels hearing how, in villages, generations of her own ancestresses knelt on the packed earth of the kitchen floor—a dozing baby tucked in a rebozo at their back, kneading dough on a stone metate, and patting and roasting tortillas—or stood feeding wood to a fire over which they endlessly stirred the contents of the family pot of beans. Unbelievable by American standards, these ancestors of yesteryear would never have been glimpsed by their Americanized brood unless perchance in a Posada graphic.

Direct visual quotes are usually snipped out of Posada's very own universe,

his Dance of Death. Artfully blending Latin and Anglo traits, these skeletons that start as borrowings end in genuine creations.

Rupert García is one of the few Chicano artists who essayed his hand at creating comical characters based on Anglo characteristics, a parallel to the sleepy squatting Mexican, broad-brimmed sombrero rejoining over his chin the folds of his red sarape, created in the U.S.A. to advertise machine-made corn tortillas and Mexican restaurants as well—even when these are named after Pancho Villa.

The problem was to parallel the comical Indian creation by one assuredly satirical for sure but along *Anglo* lines of thin-lipped humor bringing at most a smile—no small feat when we know that at its inner core a burning distaste exists for what in its turn it symbolizes.

García succeeded in his self-imposed task without weakening the sturdiness that street posters and street murals share. His “Sir Thomas Lipton,” piggy-pink, unconquered victor in trans-Atlantic yachting races, shining a bland smile under his bleached moustache, smelling more like an aftershave lotion than a sailor should, is one of Rupert’s best creations. The tea salesman in his devilish sweetness brings to mind the following refrain, originally applied to an Indian dance on the theme of the conquest:

The Conqueror dreams the devil kinky.
The Indian prefers it pinky.

Guadalupe Posada now transcends time.