

The Artist And His Angels

Music & Arts

Jean Charlot, noted Honolulu fresco artist, is spending the summer in Farmington, Mich., painting a giant fresco for the interior of Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church. His daily journal, excerpts of which are printed here, gives a vivid account of the trials and joys of painting angels on a ceiling.

By JEAN CHARLOT

JULY 6—We have the floor of the crypt for a workshop, so that I could lay down the whole ceiling at once. We laid and squared the two ceiling panels, and I started drawing the angels full scale. They look very nice so.

The work divides roughly in 10 work days for each of the 3 panels: 30 work-days makes 6 weeks. But we have to stop when there are services, so it may be slower.

JULY 7—The cartoon for the ceiling was finished yesterday and I began dividing it into day tasks. The scaffold is going up. It is of the latest model and adapts itself to the slopes of the ceiling very elegantly.

When the scaffold had reached past the ceiling we took a first measurement direct from it and found it did not coincide with those the blueprint had given me.

I was sprawling on the floor doing the large cartoon. There were onlookers. One said, "Isn't there

an easier way for you to earn a living?"

JULY 9—I had "guessed" the area closely: 1,350 square ft. It is 1,356 square ft. That makes it the biggest of my fresco jobs . . .

JULY 11—Yesterday was our first day of painting. The tip top of the ceiling, by the glass windows. It is like being in the narrow end of an inverted ice cream

sculptures, glass mosaics, even a device electrically contrived to give questions and answers on religion. A first grade Calvary got a prize.

JULY 15—I find it difficult painting the heads of my angels upside down, but I think I've completed the last of its kind. Had trouble with smooth parts of lime. Then, at noon, there was a distribution of prizes



cone, with the wall at about that slope. Also the design, to be seen right from downstairs, has to be upside down. However in spite of difficulties, all worked well.

One difficulty is that this is a very active parish. We cannot work during services as it would be truly disturbing, right behind the altar.

JULY 12—Our work seems jelled into a working routine. Yesterday was the second day and people knew pretty much what to do. The most difficult thing is that at the top the angels, to look right from the church, have to be painted headside down.

JULY 13—We had quite a number of visitors on top of our scaffold. Even one on the stout side astonished us by climbing all the way. Because of the slant of the ceiling, we paint in part lying on our backs. So it must be a very curious sight. Also the scale is unusually large.

After work, we went to judge a show of school children's work. There were many nice things, soap

for the art competition. I had to come down from my scaffold and distribute the prizes to the children. Sensation was the first grader who got a prize.

JULY 18—Not much besides work yesterday, but lots of that. I had to take out a piece and do it again. Work on a ceiling is much more difficult than on a plain wall. In a life of Hogarth I borrowed from the public library here I found rates for murals in Eighteenth-Century England: A ceiling was paid at a rate three times higher than a wall. Now I see why.

JULY 20—Painted another angel. We do the two sides of the ceiling together, alternating a piece to right and one to the left: 26 angels in all, or, so somebody said, 52 wings. It is coming nicely, at least the janitor likes it. So does the younger assistant, who says it gives a feeling of angelic presences.

JULY 24—Yesterday was not a routine work day. We tried to fit the next two

tasks to the wall and found the wall was shorter than the final blueprint given to me by 2 feet. It seems that somewhere in the building of the church the ceiling was lowered, thus affecting the size of the fresco wall. The mason was pretty shaken. I had to explain to him that the angels were an elastic design and could fly any old way. We papered the remaining unpainted wall with brown paper, and I redesigned two days' work.

JULY 27—Yesterday we touched bottom, that is the lower edge of the ceiling, for the first time. There are brick columns that cut that edge in a sort of a doily scallops manner very disagreeable, so we end on a straight line over that, and paint the lower edges to match the bricks, which makes it more dignified.

JULY 28—The piece we painted yesterday is one of the rearranged ones. It was very big and very complicated but came out smoothly. Many helped us, and

very well. Today we do the last piece of the wall of the Gospel side.

JULY 29—Yesterday we finished the ceiling panel on the left. Had a jinx on measurements to the last minute, but it is all right now. One of the angels is now a baby angel because I had to shrink him to fit the corner!

JULY 31—I had work to do. Went to the crypt of the church which is nice and cool. Brother now stays with us. Every morning he goes to early mass and reads his office. He had to squeeze in the day one hour of meditation, but decided that he could do that while painting angels!

AUG. 2—We did a nice piece yesterday, with an angel in pink. Brother is good with drapes. Today we should finish the 2nd ceiling panel, a large piece.

We want to celebrate the completion of the ceiling with a steak dinner at home—and champagne.