

jean
charlot



Exhibition of
Mexican Paintings



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The Art Students League

215 West 57th Street

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Foreword

JEAN CHARLOT is one of the younger members of a family which has been split between Mexico and Paris since about 1820. Therefore the children on both sides of the water were reared in a unique atmosphere; to them La Fontaine and Mexican picture-manuscripts were equally interesting and familiar. Thus when Jean Charlot, discharged from the French artillery at the end of the World War, restlessly turned to Mexico, he arrived already with a far deeper comprehension of the land than many residents of it. He knew the way Mexicans stand, sit, walk, dance, think; and he perceived the beautiful sculpture of familiar postures through the pitiful shellac of urban culture which, ever since the Conquest, has mistakenly hoped to erase the native past, and the native surroundings. He noted the abysmal gap between city and village, so he went to the village, which represents the great majority of the people, and which contains the real character, the real power, of the nation.

The panorama displayed to him was a mass startlingly, mediævally alive; intensely religious, and intensely creative. He studied the popular sculpture and painting which filled the markets; the murals on grog-shops, the miracle-boards in churches, and the objects kindred to these, in the archeological museums. He could furthermore approach this art more closely than with his scholarly mind, because he shares with the Mexico that interested him, the same simple, mediæval, religious devotion. To his discomfort Diego Rivera remarked in print that "If Charlot were less intelligent he would have been another Saint Luis Gonzaga."

In the year that Charlot arrived the "official" artistic circles of the city were still hanging by pedantic teeth to long-shabby Spanish tradition, and to the vulgarized excellences of France at the time of Maximilian. So with Carlos Merida, who had shortly preceded him from Paris, and David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, who followed soon after, Charlot set about the artistic revolution that is now called a Mexican renaissance. Their squad was swelled to a throng by artists returning like them, from Europe, and by others who, like the passionate Jose Clemente Orozco, had been working in isolated bitterness.

All of these leaders except Orozco had been trained in Europe; they were acquainted with the most advanced experiments of modern art. They drew upon Giotto, Massaccio, and studied Cennini for technique, but they paid equal attention to Cézanne. They succeeded in welding a Mexican style which is not archeological resuscitation, but has something in common with ancient monument, something too of the popular arts which have carried the stream of ancient and colonial style in a living version of their own, and also dovetails plastically, though it clashes in spirit, with the European art of today.

Diego Rivera, who had been well-known like many other foreigners, as one of the French moderns, settled back heavily into the throne built by the Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors of which he had been a member; Alfaro Siqueiros fled from artistic intrigue subsequent to acclamation of the new school; Merida was hailed as a new value, in Paris; Orozco rose to grandeur in New York. Charlot, for three years after the political crash of the now famous Syndicate, has been engaged in artistic-archeological work for the Carnegie Institution Expedition to Chichen-Itza. He arrived in New York to find himself in the anomalous position of the man without a country. Because he was born in Paris he is looked upon sometimes, haphazardly as an attaché, a sophisticated imitator of the "Mexican Primitives." It is not recalled that it was he who first arrived at the process of true fresco subsequently adopted by the other mural painters; that if a great number of Mexican school children and teachers express themselves delightedly in woodcuts, it is because Charlot prophetically revived that art in Mexico; that he discovered and studied the great revolutionary Mexican engraver, Jose Guadalupe Posada; and that, most important of all, his mind and skill aided in no small degree the process of analysis and synthesis to define the peculiar structural values now accrued to modern Mexican art.

Charlot has occasionally been compared by superficial speakers to Gauguin; not because of his work, but because of the fact that he has labored in glamorous fields. This comparison is typical of the naive assumption that the style of a man's work is inherited in his blood, the history of art with its "Spanish" Greco and its "French" Picasso notwithstanding. But one overwhelming fact is forgotten, though it marches in every inch of Charlot's work. This French-Jewish-Russian-Mexican by blood, Parisian in skill, mediæval in scholarship and devotion, is separated from Paris by a deliberate gulf: he repudiates the prevalent dogma of "pure art," and

proves that a subject significant, moving, interesting in itself, can be formulated in the most abstract of plastic aesthetics, and both subject and form be the richer for the union.

This is not an achievement peculiar to Jean Charlot, isolated as he is today. Many great artists—one might say all—have arrived at this fusion, each in their own way. It is furthermore the emphasis on subject that sets the Mexican painters, each in a greater or lesser degree, apart from other moderns. But few have attained as patient, as accurate, as thoughtful a balance as Charlot. Fewer still have labored alone every form, every line, so intensely, that their work from sketch to canvas and wall, from year to year is unmistakably characteristic only of themselves. This is the thing that reveals Charlot in the end, beyond accident of birth or stylistic geography, a creator of power.

—ANITA BRENNER.

Paintings, 1922-27

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|-----|--|-----|--|
| | 1. Bather at Chalma | 109 | 18. Mother and Child, Bathers |
| 136 | 2. Guitar Player | 100 | 19. Trees at Cuernavaca |
| 111 | 3. Portrait | 103 | 20. Palm Tree |
| 33 | 4. Burden Bearer | 105 | 21. Child with Blue Bonnet |
| 53 | 5. Two Women | 138 | 22. Child at the Breast 107 |
| 52 | 6. Woman with Mantle | | 23. Nude |
| 66 | 7. Dead Child | | 24. Madame X 135 |
| 49 | 8. Landscape with Magueys. | | 25. Pulqueria 134 |
| 40 | 9. Woman with Basket | | 26. A Toy 119 |
| 70 | 10. Hands | 93 | 27. At Home, Acapantzingo |
| | 11. El Cargador | | 28. Holiday |
| 137 | 12. Street-Boys. (From collection of H. E. Paul Claudel) | | 29. Conchita and Juana |
| 110 | 13. Bather | 129 | 30. Mock-Battle 133 |
| | 14. Still-life 148 | 120 | 31. Child with Mauve Sword |
| 116 | 15. Mother and Child | 147 | 32. Portrait of Anita Brenner |
| 113 | 16. Landscape with Bridge | | 33. Portrait of Manuel Martinez Pintao, sculptor |
| 117 | 17. Steam-Bath | 145 | 34. Juana |

Watercolors

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| 35. Las Pastoras, Chalma | 45. Sitting Woman |
| 36. Dance of the Pagans, Chalma | 46. The Pilgrims |
| 37. Miracle Play, Chalma | 47. Resting |
| 38. Las Malinches, Querétaro | 48. Tortillera |
| 39. Carnival, Tepoztlan | 49. Tortillera, profile |
| 40. Musician and Clown, Los Remedios | 50. Portrait |
| 41. Death-Dancer, Los Remedios | 51. The Potter |
| 42. El Tepozton, Tepoztlan | 52. Newsboys |
| 43. The Oil King | 53. Joy-Ride |
| 44. Tarascan Nude | 54. Street-Boys, sketch for No. 12 |

Woodcuts, 1922-27

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| 55. Trinidad | 59. Pilgrims |
| 56. Man with Sarape | 60. Manuel Martinez Pintao |
| 57. Cargador | 61. The Rich in Hell |
| 58. Chicken-Vendor | 62-64. Three Nudes |

Conté Crayon and Watercolor

- 65-71. Mother and Child, series

Drawings

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| 72. Woman with Basket | 82. Reyes Peres, painter |
| 73. Nude | 83. Tina Modotti, photographer |
| 74. Nude | 84. German Lizst Arzubide, poet |
| 75. American Girl | 85. A Peon |
| 76. Madame V. Suttor | 86. Mona Sala |
| 77. Anita Brenner, study for No. 33 | 87-91. Nudes, series |
| 78. Manuel Martinez Pintao | 92-95. Woman Sitting, series |
| 79. Ramon Alva Guadarrama, painter | 96-98. Tortilleras |
| 80. Maria | 99-114. Miscellaneous drawings and early work in Paris |
| 81. Vargas Rea, poet | |