MANIFESTO, CATASTROPHE, IDENTITY: POST-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICAN MURALISM AND THE ART OF NEW PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Stereotypes of ‘Mexico’ invoke the Zapatista charro: bigote, sombrero, rifle, and serape, mounted en caballo. This image and others, similarly ‘revolutionary,’ have permeated the national cultural imagination, and embedded so deeply, in fact, that they inhabit also the foreign consciousness (we’ve only to consider “Speedy Gonzales,” the “Frito Bandito,” “Jim Okay au Mexique,” and many more). These images go beyond physical caricature. They speak to what Octavio Paz names the “instinctive rebel” (16)—what he claims is the Mexican identity. This paper examines the process that led to that identity and that iconographic reputation. I argue the incredibly effective influence of the Mexican muralist movement, in shaping not only the symbolic representation of Revolution, but also its role the novel form of production, this imagery as self-claimed, national identity. Through a comparative analysis of the mural and textual art of the “Tres Grandes”—David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera—I present the mural as a productive, reconciling agent. It includes the written manifesto into a performative, public, and visual form; it recasts the violence of revolution with the iconography of unified renovation; and it solidifies the essence of this newly-defined “Mexico” on an international, public stage. I focus on the critical years immediately following the Revolution, during the 1920s and 1930s, re-examining how this revolutionary form of production helped shape the future of its society, by taming a traumatic reality, and re-writing the recent past into a validated, Revolutionary social future.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In his philosophically definitive manuscript, “El laberinto de la soledad,” (1950) Octavio Paz imagines the discovery of the self. At a certain point in development—floating between the naiveté of youth and the forced amnesia of adulthood—the individual “leans over the river of his consciousness” and “asks himself if the face that appears there…is his own” (Paz 9). Here, this self becomes conscious of the existential need to identify. This awareness, for the first time fragmenting a previously cohesive understanding, demands reconciliation; “the singularity of his being…becomes a problem and a question” (9). At once alone, yet split into multiplicity, evasive identity begins its fleeting dance. Ricocheting reflections up from physical spaces, the movement elevates to an existential search, stringing along the individual—now conscious of the fragmentation. Both mind and spirit are troubled to chase down and make sense of the pieces. Leaving the physical world that holds the entirety of childhood, this individual becomes lost in eternal concepts—and thus transgresses, captured by the realm of “adolescence.”

In this conceptual space of ‘adolescence,’ Paz locates Mexican identity.¹ Struggling to reconcile competing selves, he claims that Mexicans are the “specific group made up of those

¹As exemplified by the “Pachuco” (see his essay, “El Pachuco y otros extremos”). More than not a caricature in constant performance, the Pachuco is the “Zoot Suiter”—the Chicano youth of the 1940s L.A., who “actually flaunts his differences…to demonstrate his personal will to remain different” (Paz 14-15). Both literally and mentally adolescent, Pachucos oscillate in continuous awareness of their failure to fit the extremes: neither from the U.S. ni México, neither belonging to adulthood ni niñez.
who are conscious of themselves…as Mexicans” (Paz 11). They are plagued by a “preoccupation with the significance of his [their] country’s individuality,” reified in the constant state of developing. Such self-discovery is “above all the realization that we are alone” (10)(9).

Constantly attempting to find solid ground, the Mexican ‘adolescent’ is an “instinctive rebel,” only realized through negation: “It is the only way he can establish a more vital relationship with the society he is antagonizing” (16). Alone in the flux of agitated contradiction, this rebellion is a validating performance, a powerful domination of transitory uncertainty. This revolt, according to Paz—this self-conscious void filled by the extremes of rebellion—both creates the space for, and so itself is, Mexican identity.

The adolescent need to identify “happens to nations and peoples at a certain critical moment in their development, [when] they ask themselves: ‘What are we, and how can we fulfill our obligations to ourselves as we are?’” (Paz 9). Mexico instead faced a similar existential confrontation at the end of the 1920s, reeling in the attempts to stabilize the first revolution of the century. From every corner of the country, smoke rose—the urban factories continuing production, the discontent revolutionaries continuing to fire, the smooth politicians exuding their rhetoric—and the independent State of Mexico thus embodied Paz’s defined adolescence. The nation had broken from Spanish rule one hundred years before; gazes from across the ocean dismissed their rebellious prodigal son, seeing the revolutionary turbulence as a trivial sign of floundering development.2 Furthermore, with the influence of Positivism in Mexico—and its role

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2 Rosario Sevilla Soler, in her work entitled *La revolución mexicana y la opinión pública española: la prensa sevillana frente al proceso de insurrección*, explores a decade of Spanish press coverage on the unfolding Mexican Revolution (“The Mexican Revolution and the Public Spanish Opinion: Seville’s Press Facing the Process of Revolt”). Expecting controversial and heated debate, she instead finds little to no marked difference in public opinion sourced from opposing political vantages. Shockingly, she concludes that the Spanish sources simply “desconocían la naturaleza y la trascendencia de lo que estaba pasando” (“did not know the
in the formation of post-colonial Mexico—Europe’s presumed technological superiority necessarily questioned a hierarchy of value.³ Wanting to join the industrial boom of a modernizing world, yet wanting to dismiss European dominance; wanting to cling to cultural individuality, but wanting to move into a new social order: Mexican society oscillated in every direction of social uncertainty. And the smoke continued to rise.

Something happened in this chaotic admixture, which years later prompted Paz’s analysis—finding national identity within revolution. Initially state-sponsored, and later independently world-impacting, the Mexican mural movement worked a definitive role in this effort to reconstruct a nation—and thus to define its valid, individual identity. A “Mexican Renaissance,” its revolutionary claims shaped the nation’s image of both its heritage and its future (Coffey 4: 2012; Richardson 52). This essay follows the narrative of the post-revolutionary reconstruction, through the radical innovation of Los Tres Grandes, in what I will call “manifesto” Mexican Muralism. David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera each exemplify a distinct passage in the reformative process. In the pathos of a mural-consecrated collectivity, they each solidified a new, individual Mexican identity; moreover, their work ordered chaos and validated self-definition—through the immortalization of revolution itself.

³ “Just as scholasticism offered an orienting worldview to the Spanish colonial project, positivism south to offer an orienting principle to the emergent Mexican nation. Positivism became the gospel of the transformation of Mexican society, precisely because positivism articulated itself as a social technology. Indeed, positivism was introduced in Mexico by Gabino Barreda at a time when the nation was in search of a guiding ideology after the devastating loss to the United States in the Mexican-American war of 1848” (Gilson 4).
Through close analysis of Siqueiros’s politically radical voice, Chapter 2 establishes Mexican muralism as an appropriation of the genre of the written manifesto. Evolving Marx’s “poetry of the revolution,” the muralist creates his own new mode of production.4 Chapter 3 will then analyze the image projected by this manifesto muralism—employing José Clemente Orozco in both text and image to demonstrate this new mode of production’s social product. I will here also apply French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s understanding of catastrophe’s opportunistic novelty, whose “revolutioniz[ed] mode of production (Marx and Engel 104)” in fact “creat[es] its own space”—raising revolution itself as symbolic regeneration.5 6 Finally, Chapter 4 will acknowledge the paradoxes that surround Diego Rivera: historical indigenismo and technological innovation, the coexistence of emphatic communism and bourgeois patronage, the radical claim to authentic “Mexicanness” and the majority of his life spent abroad. Examining this conflicted space as it manifests itself in Rivera’s international creations, I argue the works’ global dissemination of a new and revolutionary Mexican identity: the collective proletariat painted by the individual artist and epitomized by his rebellious deliberate controversy.

The Mexican artist and writer Alfredo Gracia Vicente, reflected: “El hombre se puede encontrar involuntariamente en el caos, pero no por mucho tiempo. La estética, ciencia humanística por excelencia, tiende al orden, sólo se satisface en el orden, es el orden mismo”

4See Martin Puchner’s book of this same title

5 See Henri Lefebvre’s ”Space and the State” essay, found in State, Space, World Selected Essays (2009)

The chaos of the Mexican revolution may have pushed this confrontation—this “adolescent” realization of the need to defiantly self-identify—where the individual was forced to “find himself.” But it was not until the reconstructive efforts of the Post-Revolution that the individual was able to reconcile, within the collective social order shaped by Mexican muralism, the validated stability that “is art itself.” The mural movement may have failed to usher in the utopian society it imagined, but it did solidify an individual Mexican identity, validating “adolescence” as redemptive ethos. It settled the violence of revolutionary reality by elevating it to a symbolic identity—defining, through art, a new self-achieved aesthetic, and within it, coalescing the fragments of the chaotic Mexican nation. Working a new mode of production that “creates its own space,” Mexican muralism recast the tragic, recent history, and transformed it into a vision of the future: where revolution opens renovation, it becomes the place of transcendent and unifying identity.

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7 “Man may find himself momentarily in chaos, but not or very long. Aesthetics, humanistic science through excellence, arranges order, is satisfied in order, is order itself” (Gonzáles Santos 209).
Chapter 2

Paving the Space for Revolution: Mural as Manifesto

David Alfaro Siqueiros produced through negation and re-appropriation. With “tres llamamientos” to his “nueva generación americana,” he implores his fellow artists to create a novel, self-standing aesthetic.\(^8\) He rejects both “influencias fofas [de Europa] que envenenan nuestra juventud” and “las lamentables reconstrucciones arqueológicas (‘indianismo,’ ‘primitivismo,’ ‘americanismo’).”\(^9\) Instead, his modernizing and futurist-inspired art selectively re-applies—to the deconstruction of traditional aesthetic schools and the creation of a new one: from Europe, “acojamos todas las inquietudes espirituales de renovación;” from America, “acerquémonos … a las obras de los antiguos pobladores de nuestros valles, los pintores y escultores indios… Adoptemos su energía sintética.”\(^10\) He calls for “arte del

\(^8\) “three calls”

\(^9\) “new American generation”

\(^10\) “bland influences [from Europe] that poison our youth”

\(^11\) Literally, his 1921 written article, *Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación Americana* (Siqueiros 1921)

\(^12\) “Regrettable archeological reconstructions (‘Indianism,’ ‘Primitivism,’ ‘Americanism’)

\(^13\) “Let us take in all the spiritual restlessness of renewal”

\(^14\) “Let us draw closer to the works of our valleys’ ancient populations, the Indian painters and sculptors… let us adopt their synthetic energy”
futuro…ascendentemente superior.”¹⁵ “Ascendente,” it rises in the connotation of upward movement, intensifying “a pesar de sus naturales decadencias transitorias.”¹⁶ Transcending the historic reality of its fallen, physical subjects, it instead posits “sujetos nuevos” and “aspectos nuevos.”¹⁷ It is “arte del futuro,” and with artistic technology, produces revolutionary novelty.¹⁸

Revolution. Novelty. Production. During this period, when Siqueiros wrote this summoning text, these terms could not be mentioned together without invoking Marx, and his Communist Manifesto. Martin Puchner’s Poetry of the Revolution studies this classic text, using it to define the written manifesto as an act of poiesis. Building upon Aristotle’s use of the term, Puchner’s treatment of Marx (which he then extends to a range of sociopolitical-historical contexts) equates the act of creation to a manifesto’s necessarily aggressive and capturing performance. Lacking the sponsored rhetorical authority of a traditional speech act, the revolutionary manifesto instead gambles with the fictitious power of its own enactment. Rebelling against (rather than empowered by) the State, its call to action and its flamboyant assertion of ideals stage the authority of what it hopes to—and only after may actually—realize in action:

The revolutionary manifesto will break the conjunction of authority, speech, and action on which this old manifesto rests and instead create a genre that must usurp an authority it does not yet possess, a genre that is more insecure and therefore more aggressive in its attempts to turn words into actions and demands into reality. (Puchner 12)

In essence, the manifesto is a bluff. By ideological imperative, it demands that its

₁⁵ “art of the future…increasingly superior”
₁⁶ “in spite of its transient and decadent real-life subjects”
₁⁷ “new subjects” and “new aspects”
₁⁸ “art of the future”
audience act upon the existence of a reality it, in fact, so motivates the group to construct. It relies upon a new creative mode (“will break the conjunction […] on which this old manifesto rests”), and forms a new expression fitting to the activist spirit it promotes. For the revolutionary manifesto, “historical borrowings” are “no longer adequate” (Puchner1). Instead, it employs an artistic, technical method based on projection, performance, and imagination—simulating the future through an innovative and industrious “poetry of the revolution” (Puchner1).

Manifesto is thus defined by this rebellion-induced novelty, performing as if social change were already realized, and creating an inevitability toward a yet to-be-formed future. But if the genre initially emerged as a necessary new productive mode—responding first to the novelty of the 19th century revolutions, then to the post-revolutionary Mexican context—a new, 20th century version of Marx and Engel’s critical environment—a new mode of production was likewise required: as Marx himself writes, Revolutionary expression “cannot derive its poetry from the past, but only from the future” (Marx 6).

Mexican muralism evolved the genre of ‘manifesto,’ co-operating the Marxist imperative towards innovation in response to their own, tumultuous social context. The painters had been commissioned to make sense of the revolution by a government hoping to stabilize its control through orchestrated cultural propaganda. Itself thus born directly from revolution, muralism projected a vision of the social chaos in which it existed; however, the very process of its iconographic production ordered the turmoil. The resulting product tamed the tumultuous content of its depiction, solidifying into an “ordered chaos,” which—at this very juncture—was

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19 “The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot derive its poetry from the past, but only from the future” (Marx 6)

20 At the time, under the direction of then-Minister of Education José Vasconcelos (Greeley 15)
still only hypothetical and envisioned by its artist. Put in a public display, the mural provided a novel visual technology for ideological dissemination. It presented validating social order in its post-revolutionary time and space—simulating an idyllic, unified middle class in the performance of a reality not yet instated. Developing a new artistic aesthetic, it painted an iconography to validate and define its society’s rebellion; imagining the redemption of history, it published the visual poëses of the socially influential manifesto genre. By this means, the mural manifesto industriously worked as one of the initial efforts towards a reconstruction. It unified, within the space of art’s new social production, demanding the reality of a yet-to-be-realized Mexican identity.

As the most radically political of the Tres Grandes, David Alfaro Siqueiros’s art demonstrates the most obvious embodiment of this nuanced manifesto. Often described as the innovator among the three, Siqueiros developed a visual-textural style based on creative re-invention of the fresco, incorporating new materials, such as the commercial emergence of pyroxlene and Duco industrial paint.21 As Jennifer Jolly notes: “Casting not just in content, but also [in] production and reception […] his continued refinement of muralism into a collective art form defined artistic production in communist ideological terms” (Jolly,75, 78). I would add, also, that “not just in content […] production and reception,” but also in lifestyle, Siqueiros lived always crossing the extremes of political boundaries. Leading unions, militias, and even assassination attempts, the precarious radical typified his tumultuous revolutionary context

21 Rita Pomade, columnist for Mexconnect magazine, writes, “Siqueiros was the most innovative of the three. Although he started working in traditional fresco technique (watercolor washed onto damp plaster), he soon abandoned it to experiment with pyroxlene, a commercial enamel, and Duco, a transparent automobile paint. His work is recognized by his rapid, bold line and exaggerated perspective. His ability to integrate traditional Mexican art with innovative techniques was masterful. The result is original, powerful, and dramatic” (Pomade).
—even more, he was its embodiment and promoter. “Casting” his art through revolutionary technique, content, and personal activism, Siqueiros (per)formed a multi-dimensional process of new production: revolutionary technique, content, and individual activism all functioned in sync, enacting a collective, ideological unification that worked to define—and therefore construct—the fragmented society that surrounded him.

Siqueiros painted the fewest murals of all three Grandes despite (or perhaps because) of his radical political activism. Though his most studied works are the later ones from his more mature career, his very early art in the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria is exemplary of his notorious rebellion—and for this reason perhaps most emblematic of his overall aesthetics.22

_El entierro de un obrero sacrificado_ (1924) (Figure 1) depicts three indigenous men carrying the coffin of a fallen comrade, with a fourth man (distinctly mestizo in appearance) posited in the upper right corner. The coffin, strikingly blue, invokes indigenous symbolism.23 Yet it also includes the communist symbolic hammer and sickle—blurring indigenous, campesino, and urban distinctions. In the upper right hand corner, the mural repeats this equation, where both indigenous and mestizo gazes are drawn into the inclusive red star of communist symbology (Salazkina 51). The coffin is lifted, and class distinctions fall, raising instead one body: the revolutionary soul, immortalized in his death as the encompassing “sacrificed worker.”

Of course, the mural depicts a still-unrealized communist society, and Siqueiros voiced an only-fictitiously united Mexican proletariat. Since the revolution began, the loyalties of the

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22 See, among many others: Shifra Goldman’s “Siqueiros and Three Early Murals in Los Angeles,” Jean Charlotte’s “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” Fernando Fabio Sánchez’s “Artful Assassins: Murder as Art in Modern Mexico”

23 such coloring was believed to ward off evil spirits (Peña Guillermina 30)
working class had been spread over at least nine different political factions. Its organization and control, in fact, was one main motivation of the government in commissioning the muralist painters at this critical time (Greeley 15). However, *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado* projects the scenario of co-existent indigenous and mestizo, campesino and urban—united under the coffin of a comrade unidentified by class or race. Disseminating, therefore, a defined social cohesion that was not yet tangible, the mural performs an imperative for the future, motivating what had previously lived only in the vision of its politically-motivated creator.

But Siqueiros never finished the mural. Painted in the Colegio San Ildefonso, an elite preparatory school, his overtly anti-bourgeois work invited harsh critique. Although the project was initially government-sponsored, it became, as Jennifer Jolly writes, “unacceptable as government art, as long as the current elite controlled public discourse.” The State retracted its sponsorship of the project and Siqueiros abandoned his work—leaving it to be vandalized by dissidents and, eventually, literally whitewashed into memory.

*El entierro de un obrero sacrificado*—although considered by some a "failure" because of its incompletion—demonstrates how the mural’s controversial reception is in fact what propels it as “manifesto,” a new mode of performative, and yet reconstructive, production. The future-aiming motivation of its content goes beyond mere depiction, to further enact its own, symbolic imagery. Puchner writes:

> The author of the manifesto ‘must openly declare himself partisan in his writings, and do so with all the resources of rhetoric and passion required to win partisans to his cause,’ but this necessity registers not only on the level of rhetoric, tone, and style but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the manner in which the text understands itself, namely, as

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24 Arenistas, Cedillistas, Chavistas, Felicistas, Finqueros, Pelaecistas, Soberanistas, Villistas, Zapatistas ("Mexican Revolution Timeline")

25 See David Craven’s *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (2006)
a ‘means,’ an instrument, a ‘political act.’ [...] This is another way of saying that the manifesto must use and instrumentalize the the atricality that enables it to create roles, characters, and agents. The manifesto projects a scenario for which it must then seek to be the first realization. (Puchner 29)

Siqueiros not only declared communist rebellion with the pictorial content of El entierro, he further performed it with the deliberately political sacrifice of his mural, as a gesture of support for the idealized proletariat. Quite literally, the artist’s “manifesto projects a scenario”—of sacrifice for the cause of proletariat unity—and in the revolutionary statement of authorial abandonment, “seek[s] to be the first realization.” Rejected both by the State and by organized public discourse of the bourgeoisie, the art marshaled international leftist attention, uniting formerly disparate parties to the same side of this one political issue, in support of this communist ideology (Jolly 76).

The Communist Russian film artist, Sergei Eisenstein, wrote in his memoires, “a mi generación le gustaba lo tajantemente inacabado de la plástica mexicana,” and later even recreated the “decidedly incomplete” mural in his 1930 ¡Qué viva México!” (Einstein 281)(Tibol 77). Enacting an imagined unity and eliciting a threatened response, El entierro de un obrero sacrificado self-destructs, creating unity in its ruin, and propitiating a different form of realization. Like the martyred worker it portrays, the project becomes immortal in the scandal of its own sacrificed body. It shapes a united working class, both in painted image and as a

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26 “My generation liked the decidedly incompletion of Mexican art” (Einstein 281).

27 Markedly, this immortalized body is that of un obrero—a masculine ideal that works to project a masculine unity, which shapes the exemplar Mexican proletariat—also unwaveringly male. In fact, Siqueiros scrutinized the female artist, reacting to the innovative aesthetic of student María Izquierdo with: “no hay más ruta que la nuestra” (Craven 36). In a time in Mexico when—according to Izquierdo—“it’s a crime to be born a woman,” supporting the feminine artistic movement would have been itself another strong promotion of revolutionary ideology. Embodying the essence of ‘Revolution’ in every other form, this very “patriarchal” and “hardly
controversial artifact. Acting comprehensively in production of this social organization, it demonstrates the mural as a new and influentially (re)constructive technology: the evolved mode of performative manifesto.

To argue that the mural is a strategically developed production, it becomes necessary to examine the contextual interaction between pictorial mural, and the traditional manifesto as a written text. Coterminal with his performance of *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado*, and in the wake of the contra-revolutionary uprisings also breaking out in Mexico’s catastrophic social space, Siqueiros stepped into the position of Secretary General for the Sindicato del Obreros Técnicos, Escultores y Pintores (Technical, Sculptor and Painter Worker’s Syndicate). With the signed support of Orozco, Rivera, and five other chairmen, he drafted the Syndicate’s written manifesto.28

From the beginning, the text summons together ‘our side’—a collective, equally comprised of intellectuals and artists, tillers of field, and factory workers: “del nuestro [lado] […] tú, obrero del campo[…] tú, obrero de la ciudad[…] tú, soldado indio” (Siqueiros 1).29 It reacts to the crisis of the reconstituted Mexican State—which had never quite superseded the risk of falling again into revolution—defining its equality in opposition of common antagonists: “los ‘revolutionary’” (Craven 36) social exclusivity so necessarily needs out to be questioned. Why gets to be a part of the unity the Mexican muralism promoted? Why is the female figure left out of the revolution’s symbolic elevation of renovated identity, and what have been the repercussions? Whereas the issue is outside the major claims of this thesis discussion, I will continue throughout the thesis, with notes similar to this, to probe the engendered spaces of the reforming Mexican society. I will follow this selective inclusivity of the renovated “Revolution,” to aid further scholars who may continue this important study.

28 Xavier Guerrero, Fermín Revueltas, Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Germán Cueto, and Carlos Mérida

29 “On our side, those who cry out for the elimination of an old and cruel order…you, worker of the countryside, you…worker of the city…you, Indian soldier” (Siqueiros 1)
más significativos enemigos de las aspiraciones de los campesinos y de los obreros de México” (Siqueiros 1). Collectivity is created, therefore, only by in the sacrifice a contending force, the “desaparición de un orden envejecido y cruel.” In this us/them dichotomy, ‘our side’ then coalesces in the “frente único para combatir el enemigo común” (Siqueiros 3); and performing the same vision projected also by El entierro, the text here summons one “united front” in the newly-defined space of revolutionary sacrifice.

In this way, Siqueiros’s traditional manifesto text performs, as Puchner describes it, the social unity that results from revolutionary communism. However, even this written document itself defers to the mural as the more effective tool to inspire action. When Siqueiros writes of “la revolución social más ideológicamente organizada que nunca,” he clarifies that art is the motivating actor of this “ideological organization” (Siqueiros 1). Addressing the Mexican

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30 “The most significant enemies of the aspirations of the countrymen and workers of Mexico” (Siqueiros, pg. 1)

31 Former interim president and minister of finance, Adolfo de la Huerta, had broken with the presidency of Álvaro Obregón. Collaborating generals Enrique Estrada, Guadalupe Sánchez, and Fortunato Maycotte, he instigated an armed revolt against the Obregón administration, looking to oust his chosen radical successor, Plutarco Calles (Fernando Castro Martínez 211). Though failing to overthrow the government, the revolt failed marks a distinct political climate, filled with turmoil, contradicting factions, and a tumultuously unsettled revolutionary society (“Adolfo de la Huerta”).

32 “disappearance [or even ‘extinction,’ as the Spanish “desaparición” also implies] of an old and cruel order”

33 Both the Porfiriato, based on favoritism, positivism, and corruption; and the capitalism of contra-revolutionary uprisings

34 The new, equalizing system is founded in the shared space of revolutionary identity. While this argument will be developed in the second section of this thesis—through the example of José Clemente Orozco—we see here an example supporting the concept also in the art of Siqueiros.

35 “The most ideologically organized social revolution to date”
artists, Siqueiros emphasizes their role both as guide and representative. He charges them with this task: “hacemos un llamamiento urgente a todos los campesinos, obreros, y soldados revolucionarios” (Siqueiros 3). This “hacemos” creates an exclusivity of only intellectuals and artists. While most of the text addresses all syndicate members, the artists here are separated from the rest—as the creators who make this “urgent call” for the entire proletariat class: “campesinos, obreros, y soldados.” Art itself, according to this implication, is this exigent appeal, drawing together a unified people; once united, they themselves become the productive force. The text points to art as a social creator, as much as worker. It leads by example, and so, both documents and forges the path of social production.

The manifesto script therefore stands in dialogue with the manifesto mural—in this example, by mirroring its unification/destruction dialectics, and then also by furthering in writing the authority of the plastic arts. Both forms of performed elaboration assume an egalitarian society, while at the same time inciting the collective realization of this vision; the text-image interaction—enabled by the evolution of manifesto to mural—is a multi-media performance, which itself becomes a new mode of ideological and social production.

Siqueiros sees the development of this new mural aesthetic as “un arma que entra por los ojos, por los oídos, y a través de lo más profundo y sutil del sentimiento humano” (Siqueiros). It is a totally inclusive performance, and therefore the most effective and affective push toward

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36 “We make an urgent call to all the farmers, workers, and revolutionary soldiers”

37 For example, at the end of the document, “formamos”—“formamos un frente único para combatir al enemigo común” (Siqueiros, pg. 3)—“we” again opens to include the entire working, fighting community of the Mexican pueblo.

38 “a weapon that penetrates the eyes, the ears, and through the deepest and subtlest human feeling”
mobilization. This new mode of production, an optimal new technology for producing active response, paves a new, validly demarcated, social space—summoning a structured working class out of revolutionary chaos. But, paradoxically, this proletariat unites in a force that is also known for its destruction: revolution. Relying on the critical Mexican context to project through its novelty to the future, the new production of manifesto muralism, in other words, converts its tumultuous reality into a new symbolic ideal. United under the banner of revolution, and disseminating its own ideological identity, chaos elevates toward spiritual renewal. Now a defined and validated new space of opportunity, the painful memory of violence fades, lost in the shadow of its icon of a new Mexican identity.
Figure 1. *El entierro de un obrero sacrificado* (1924)

[Image of the painting]
Chapter 3

Spiritual Symbolism of Revolutionary New Identity

When the Mexican State crumbled in revolution in 1910, with it dissipated the control and cohesive relationship of its all-encompassing domination. Under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the nation had been built upon the tenets of positivism, industrialization, and commodity. Its production had relied on Europe’s favor and exploitation of workers; allied aristocracy and foreign investors attempted to construct the façade of economic boom. With the destruction of this system, however, the nation experienced a new freedom that itself crossed into unbridled chaos—where little reconciliation and much continued controversy left Mexico teetering precariously on the brink of unending violent outbreak. A unifying response was needed: neither the Porfirian ideology of Eurocentric vision, nor the scattered factions of indigenous partisans. Instead, a new post-revolutionary climate required a new mode of production, unifying to form of itself a new social order.

The revolutionary catastrophe of the Mexican State thus opened this new opportunity for cultural re-formation. Having already argued that Mexican muralism performed the constructive new mode of organizing production, it becomes necessary, then, to define the disseminated ideology of the social space it claimed. I move now to examine another Mexican muralist of this period, José Clemente Orozco, and through his own captivating manifesto performance demonstrate what I previously only suggested: that the manifesto mural not only reclaimed the productive cultural means through the advantage of the Revolution, but further optimized the novelty of this catastrophic context by elevating an iconography of its own nature: the symbolic identity of Revolution itself.
Revolution invites chaos. In its all-encompassing novelty, it risks a tragic transition to the unknown. In order to approach this strange and terrifyingly moldable political space, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre offers a schematic that gives structure to its liminality. Lefebvre introduces what he names the “space of catastrophe”—a process-turned-possibility, where one mode of production captures another, and a new space arises from the sacrificial destruction wrought upon the organized State.\(^{39}\) As one space collapses, and a new one arises to displace it, the disparity creates its own “differential space.” Unique from the former, and not solidified into the replacement, it is a Hegelian third dimension.\(^{40}\) Where once was a bleeding void, there now exists categorized novelty; what was previously mere transition, now is named, defined, and so confirmed as validated social space. For Mexico, immediately post-revolution—where racial distinctions still striated classes, and politics still divided brothers—all Lefebvrian standards would agree that the space of catastrophe had been ripped wide open.

Disenchanted by the past influences dictating cultural production, artist José Clemente Orozco articulates these principles, even years before Lefebvre’s schematization, based upon the renovating production of “New Art” (what I have called, previously, “manifesto muralism”)

\(^{39}\)“To clear a path, we have to destroy the [established] models” (Lefebvre 163)

\(^{40}\)Greig Charnok’s “Challenging New State Spatialities: The Open Marxism of Henri Lefebvre” argues that Lefebvre’s philosophy may be situated in the field of Open Marxism. Based upon its Hegelian implications, we may so read Lefebvre’s delineation of interacting spaces as a process of Hegelian thesis-antithesis-synthesis development (Charnok 1285-89). In Mexican society, this same catastrophic space so carries Hegel’s connoted spiritual novelty of synthesis, especially as paired with his belief that spiritual reconciliation is found in artistic production. By this understanding, New Art’s creation of a dialectically-organized Mexican culture “actually alleviate[s] the most overpowering and tragic catastrophes by means of the creations it offers” (Hegel).
Describing the nature of this form, he publishes the creed of his ideology: “New World, New Races, and New Art.” In the text, Orozco denies past artistic practice, and opts for only a vision of the projected, idyllic future. The new production of “New Art” is formed by denouncing all others, and employing negation as a means of self-orientation:

The Art of the New World cannot take root in the old traditions of the Old World, nor in the aboriginal traditions represented by the remains of our ancient Indian peoples…[and] to go solicitously to Europe, bent on poking about in its ruins in order to import them and servilely copy them, is not greater error than is the looting of the indigenous remains of the New World with the object of copying with equal servility its ruins or its present folk-lore. (Orozco xlv)

Factually, of course, these sources are ancient-rooted—not buried—and continue to live their own expression. Yet Orozco’s disavowal rejects their simple imitation because they have previously existed. Since novelty cooperates the revolutionary call to redefine social design, then for Orozco, aesthetic traditions of the past simply lack the ability to speak for a catastrophically novel, post-revolutionary context: “However picturesque and interesting they [antiquated influences] may be, however productive and useful ethnology may find them, they cannot furnish a point of departure for New Creation” (Orozco xlv).

On the other hand, if new social space may provide validating definition, then the chaos of a collapsing State itself becomes the advantage. Orozco writes, “Each new cycle must work for itself, must create, must yield its own production” (Orozco xlv); and Lefebvre corroborates in

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41 Supported by both Orozco’s artwork and writing, I hold that he, like Siqueiros, paints what I am defining as the genre of “manifesto mural.” He relies on a new technological mode, motivated by the utopic opportunity of a rejuvenated future: He also describes this “New Art” in technological terms, describing the mural as the driving machinery of new social production: “Una pintura es…hecho de relaciones entre palabras, sonidos, o ideas…organizadas necesariamente de tal suerte que el todo trabaja como una máquina automática” (Tibol).

42 Emphasis added
his own words, “the new mode of production…must produce its own space” (267). Here, both writers confirm that a new mode is motivated to define a social order that reflects its own character. “Catastrophe” is thus not only a chasm that may validly self-define; in this sense, it also creates a void that is nearly vaginal, giving birth to a future that by nature manifests the self-acclaimed identity.

Again returning to the Mexican context, “New Art” both technologically produces new cultural identification, and also is itself the manifested visual product of this newly identified culture. It is born into—and because of—catastrophe, and so codifies this turmoil into the image it projects. Responding first to revolution, it necessarily doubles as artifact of revolutionary definition—providing the nation with a paradoxical new, unified identity: Revolution itself, renovated in Revolutionary iconography.

“New Art”—‘manifesto muralism’—therefore forms a composite aesthetic of renovation and inevitable self-perpetuation. But for Orozco, the exigency for a new mode that would “produce itself” also needs to advance a dialectical process of the nation’s post-revolutionary healing, away from corrupt, old—and even over-lording present—social systems (Lefebvre 267).  

43 Having studied under the pioneering Mexican painter, Gerardo Murillo Cornado (better

43 The Mexican government had drafted La Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos in 1917. Under the leadership of Francisco Madero, 1911 had seen the first wave of revolutionaries successfully take power; but then, six years and the chaos of the Decena Trágica later, the newly elected Venustiano Carranza called an assembly to draft the new State law (“Mexico: Constitución, 1917”). However, Carranza’s own upper-middle class upbringing reflected in his political strategy, which looked to advance Madero’s bourgeois-leaning policies. Though the new constitution radically improved the Porfiriato dictatorship, and attempted to placate working-class demands, the major tenets (agricultural reform, land re-distribution, labor laws, etc.), poorly suited the already-oppressed classes. Many later amendments would be made to rectify the disparity and its upper-class favoritism. For Orozco also, the constitution was an improvement to Díaz’s government; but it unsatisfactorily fell into North American materialist interests, and failed to deliver truly egalitarian reform (see “El banquete de los ricos” (1923-24),
known as Dr. Atl), Orozco believed in art’s paramount ability to combat the Porfiriato’s naturalism and material commodification. Following ‘manifesto mural’s’ instrumental and influential capacity, the result, for Orozco, is an artistic responsibility: the “unavoidable duty to produce New Art, in a new *spiritual and physical* medium” (Orozco xlv) [my emphasis]. To create “New Art”—with a renovated, Revolutionary spirituality—was to “stand against the analytical and objective realism which they saw as a reflection of the prevailing ruling ideology of scientific positivism of the Díaz dictatorship[…]promoting in its place a [renovating] view of art that was essentially spiritual and symbolist[…]the reaction against academic realism” (Rochfort 17). Exemplifying the producing/product duality of symbolically renovated Revolution, Orozco’s *Hombre en llamas* (1936-9) stains the yawning dome of Guadalajara’s *Hospicia Cabañas*. A blazing body scorches the mural’s center, whose fiery background further marks an which criticizes the continued disparity between social classes, despite being painted in the elite Colegio San Ildefonso) (“El banquete”).

44 Establishing a new nationalist emphasis in the Academia de San Carlos, Atl mentored Orozco and other willing—even daring—young artists to denounce the contemporaneous positivism of the Díaz regime (Aguilar-Moreno 7). In 1910, he strategically organized a national exhibition, in order to counteract the “insufferably exclusive European cultural preoccupations of the nation’s ruling classes” (Rochfort 16). The stratagem publicly mocked a preceding Díaz-sponsored showcase, which had glorified Spanish art. For Atl and his students, such fanatical consumption of European money, culture, and approval not only devalued their independence as Mexican artists, but also epitomized the corrupt dictatorship thriving on the disparity in socio-economic classes.

45 This reactionary attitude toward art manifests in Orozco’s stylistic evolution, through which he broke from old Byzantine methods, yet without conforming to modern cubist trends (Coffey 4-5). Instead—as I will develop throughout this thesis—his “spiritual and symbolic” treatment of art worked against both antiquated and dominating modes of artistic production—through this novel aesthetic, renovating the revolutionary images it presented.
atmosphere of tragedy and chaos. The spectators rimming the bottom of the painting are fraught, elongated figures—grey and sinister as they gaze up at the ardent figure.

Yet faithful to the ideology of New Art—to not just paint the surrounding reality, but to innovate a productive aesthetic that will change it—the mural evolves its catastrophic imagery into a spiritual ideal of unified identity. A body rises through the flames, transcending in an inspirational and upward movement that arrives at the welcomed area of new self. Forming an organically intertwined circuit around the mural’s rim, the strained figures likewise coalesce as one unit. Their bodies become indistinguishable as one connecting portal, with faces together pulled upwards in awe—all in support of the transcendent, flaming body. Painting revolution as revival, the image broadcasts renovation—where unmistakable new life is made possible through catastrophe, as itself the catalyst to new, collective identity.

However, Orozco seemingly contradicts his stressed imperative to produce art by a totally new aesthetic. Despite the revolutionary content of Hombre en Llamas, it is painted in a style even recognized as “classical” (Grobet 49). The rising man’s witnesses are painted with long, martyr-like features, traditional to mystic, religious European iconography. Also, the painter’s sophisticated technique reminds of his elite academic training. In fact, the image places itself in direct conversation with the work of the post-Byzantine artist, El Greco, and his mural depiction of El entierro del Conde Orgaz (1587). Just as Hombre en llamas, the Spanish mural depicts a man’s ascension, captured in the movement of transitional (re)birth. Surrounded, too, by grey iconographic spectators, the transcending Count moves through an almost vaginal entrance, heralding birth into transcendent life. In both murals, death is necessary to open a new

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46 This body, like that of Siqueiros’s martyred obrero, is notably male. The spiritual unification here posited is, therefore, completely lacking recognition of the feminine presence in post-revolutionary reconstruction (see note 12 in this text’s section dedicated to David Alfaro).
vital space, where the figure is depicted as ascending—into a renewed personal life, for the unification of his crowd of witnesses.

Although Orozco’s use of El Greco seems to follow his contemporaries’ European imitation, and contradict the ideal ‘production of novelty,’ it is precisely through this spiritual iconography that he protests Díaz’s naturalism, and develops a personalized aesthetic to project the self-acclaimed identity of Revolution. The style in fact works on three levels of meaning: content, symbol, and transcendence. Together, they produce a statement of affective innovation—faithfully projecting a manifesto performance of symbolic, revolutionary identity.

The first of these nuanced techniques appears in the featured content of Hombre en llamas. Despite initial analysis that may seem to indicate otherwise, the mural does countermand European presence, even ironizing it by injecting indigenous protagonists. Critics agree that the four figures surrounding the portal’s entrance, though painted in the style of Christian iconography, allegorically symbolize the four natural elements. The spiritual power of Christianity employed by classical artists—and denied completely in the era of contemporary European cubism—is here recognized, and then displaced, by the indigenous cultures’ connections to nature (“Hospicio Cabañas, Guadalajara”). The transcendence of the mural’s protagonist is not through any European empowerment, but rather through the heralding power of native peoples. Allegorically highlighting indigenous value via European aesthetic, Orozco conforms to neither mode. In fact, the betraying combination causes ‘catastrophe’ to each individual source—again creating a novel space, and installing, instead, his own socially critical, aesthetic production.

Secondly, when drawing from El Greco, Orozco’s symbolism appears to violate his own, iconoclastic ideology. However, El Greco is characterized by Mannerism and Anti-naturalism,
and Orozco merely adopts these styles of social defiance and spiritual invocation. Both Mannerism and Anti-naturalism were in their time counter-cultural, the latter even in nomenclature speaking to negation and rebellion: anti-naturalism, defined by innate antagonism. Both modes were spurred by their surrounding culture—responding to deny a popular focus on physical materiality, and at the same time, emphasizing style over content (“Mannerism”). In other words, these early aesthetic codes for the first time valued a new mode of production, as needed to influence a contemporaneous social reality. El Greco represented one of the counter-cultural (revolutionary) creators of his time; when Orozco borrowed his (allegorical) symbolic code of a rebellious spiritual aesthetic (while, again, re-inventing it with the insertion of his own nation’s content), he borrowed both novelty and historically specific, spiritually-relevant, social production—adopting both into his own Mexican context.

Faithful to his nationalist rooting, and committed to produce “New Art in a new physical and spiritual medium” (Orozco xlv), Orozco includes both architecture and viewer in the revitalizing image of his art—by this means, pushing his work definitively beyond European mimicry, instead toward new transcendence. With the conviction that murals should “mejorar o superar el valor estético que tiene la arquitectura en sí,” Orozco creates Hombre en llamas to “go beyond” its architecture’s already-symbolic spirituality (Villaurrutia 1011). The dome’s history has seen it as a passage to the ethereal; in Christian tradition, its inner cupola is repeatedly imprinted with the image of the resurrected Savior. Elevating both the viewer’s physical gaze and spiritual focus, the traditional purpose of the dome’s architecture facilitated connection to the

47 “better or go beyond the aesthetic value of the architecture itself”

48 The same image of Christ Pantocrator appears in all of the following cathedrals: Cefalù Cathedral, Sicily; Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem; Church of the Saviour on the Blood (Храм Спаса на Крови), St. Petersburg; Cappella Palatina, Palermo (“Monk”).
resurrected Christ. El Greco, painting with the inspiration of this Christian Renaissance art, also places Christ at his work’s apex, in this position symbolizing new life. Yet, while *El entierro del Conte Orgaz* looks straight upon the scene, as a displaced third-party observer, *Hombre en llamas* is focalized from within. Artist and audience occupy the same perspective, with gazes pulled upwards, nearly following the burning man through chaos, and into revival. The permanency of the fresco itself permeates on and into the physical structure of the dome, pushing the symbolism of the architecture and blurring divisions in representation and reality. The mural lives the image it is constantly creating. It utilizes both symbol and structure experimentally, in an interactive process of participatory creation. Performed art here installs its presence, and summons all viewers to join in solidarity the man ascending. It reactivates the old architectural method of the dome, and into the catastrophic novel space of re-appropriation, raises a new figure—so transcending to a space above historical burden, in the fusion of spiritual and material renovation.

Orozco therefore clearly adapts El Greco’s strengths to suit his own catastrophic, Mexican context; yet, well studied, he also builds upon the revolutionary strategies of the Greek artist’s work. He marveled at the painter’s transcendence over his own time and space. In his 1945 autobiography (*Autobiografía*), he writes of *El entierro del Conde Orgaz*:

> En Toledo entierran todavía al conde de Orgaz, todavía vive El Greco, ahí pinta y sus apóstoles trabajan a diario. Alguno lleva mi equipaje al hotel, otro me sirve un vaso de vino, el de más allá es el chofer del camión a Madrid y veo otro más en el puente de Alcántara. (Orozco 109) ⁴⁹

⁴⁹ “In Toledo, they are still burying the Count of Orgaz; still El Greco lives there painting, and his followers work daily. One carries my luggage to the hotel, another serves me a glass of wine, one from over there is the driver of the truck in Madrid, and I see yet another on the Alcántara bridge.” (Orozco 109)
El Greco’s mural had moved him beyond time; it had never stopped living where the artist had planted it. It proved to Orozco that such artwork disseminates ideology through a space greater, even, than that which it physically occupies: its “followers work daily” in hotels, restaurants, cities, and sites all across Spain. They are the common people—the workers—who are part of the continuing process that El Greco had painted. Orozco witnessed El Conde in every corner of the common Spaniard’s identity—its quality of unbiased permeation resounding with his own ideology of “championed [...] universal culture” (Indych-López 103). Invoking this same aesthetic quality, he borrows its transcendence of time—and, paradoxically, it is by this very intangible spirituality that the mural so reaches its permanence.⁵⁰

When Orozco consecrates the Mexican identity with the flames of revolution, however, he does not leave the ardent man to rise alone. Instead, he invokes mural art’s essential publicity, and with it draws collectivity by this now-published revolutionary identity. “For the people,” the mural is more easily accessible, and more accessibly read (Orozco xlvi). Furthermore, by painting the iconographic grey figures as spectators of the miraculous vision, and then painting the mural so that the audience occupies this same perspective, the art includes its audience as characters of the image itself. The mural paints its readers, and the act of reading at once forces collective participation in the performance of the image. Coalesced in the enactment, all viewers of the mural so commune under equal identity.

⁵⁰ Here considering manifesto art metaphysically motivated, I digress to explore the means by which Siqueiros and Rivera achieve this same transcendence: that is, purposeful intangibility for ironic permanence, and transient-based performance, for socially memorable longevity. It is obvious, as exemplified by the performative, spiritual nature of Orozco’s work, that the manifesto mural seeks to project beyond its own time and space, and enter ideological immortality. I wish to probe the idea that all Tres Grandes aim for this spirituality—for the sake of cultural, ideological dissemination—by, in fact, leaving mural works unfinished. Appendix 2 presents evidence of this argument for each one of the artists.
Compelling the public into the very process of New Art’s creation, Orozco paints new production, and therefore, new product of revolutionary identity, as a collaborative process. It connects with the proletariat, via new creation and public inclusion—the masses participating in the realization of the mural image. Disseminating a universal ideology—a newly-defined class of the coalesced revolutionaries—New Art works the categorized novelty of catastrophe. It reconstitutes a previously fragmented culture as it redeems beyond class divisions and historic inequality, and raises Revolution as the symbolic collective identity of its utopic new society. More than relying just on the artist, the Mexican future depends upon the collective development of new catastrophic space, new revolutionary mode, and a new reconstructing production.

Orozco’s mural manifesto is more than just a political projection, as evident in Siqueiros’s work. It is collectively spiritual, through the painted renewal of the revolutionary figure. The painter claims—in the paradoxical statement of his own Marxist affiliations—that "no artist has, or ever has had, political convictions of any sort [...] those who profess to have them are not artists" (Coffey 209). Purposefully overstating the emphatic disassociation, he instead hyperbolizes a higher significance—of art as a universal, aesthetic, and independently allegorical device. Creating “New Art” as new production, which in fact produces “its own space”, Orozco at once renders violent rebellion as symbolic, solidifying a reconciled image of the disordered Mexican war(s) (Lefebvre 224). Revolution itself thus becomes integral to reconstruction: in a cleanly defined new social space, the artist paradoxically reifies conflict as national—pacified, unifying, and even celebratory—collective identity.
Figure 2. *Hombre en llamas* (1936-9)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Figure 3. El entierro del Conde de Orgaz (1587)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Chapter 4

International Dissemination of National Identity

In 1915, Diego Rivera painted *Zapatista Landscape—The Guerilla* (Figure 4). He had returned to Paris after spending a few short months in Mexico, where he “happened upon a battle between Zapatistas and Porfiristas,” which would leave him forever changed (Richardson 50). Painting a reflective tribute in *Zapatista Landscape*, in the Synthetic style of Cubism, Rivera combines Mexican Revolutionary symbols through the “revolutionary movement” of novel aesthetics. Rifle, bandolier, and *sarape* all join harmoniously in juxtaposed and disfigured geometrics, cumulatively shaping the great revolutionary leader, Emiliano Zapata. It is a painting to commemorate revolution—created in this Parisian context to reflect the greatest rebel icon of Mexico—and, upon completion, was described by the artist as “the most faithful expression of the Mexican mood that I have ever achieved” (“Diego Rivera Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works).

Rivera had fallen in love with Revolution. Having left Mexico at age twenty-one—on the financial privilege of scholarship and the advantage of artistic talent—he lived the majority of his formative adolescent years under the instruction of elite, erudite, and thoroughly European aesthetic schools. So growing up in a social climate more European than Mexican, he absorbed rebellious ideology from his expatriate friends, and passed many hours mesmerized under the influence of their radical Communist instruction (Richardson 50).\(^5\) When the young idealist did

\(^5\) Both art and politics were churning at this time, as the waves of Marxist ideology swept through Europe. With avant-garde and cubist aesthetic movements also revolutionizing artistic creation, Rivera and fellow politically-minded intellectuals gathered in the Parisian Café Rotonde, and “fervently discussed art and politics, both of which they felt were in process of radical transformation” (Richardson 50).
briefly return to Mexico in 1910, he *experienced* for the first (and only) time the revolution with which he had long been enamored. The brief encounter permitted him only a snippet of the brutal turmoil tearing at his nation, and—returning to Europe before idealistic first-impressions lost their alluring impact—Rivera retained only a fantastically optimistic image of the war’s idealism. He here associated ideology with the personally affective image of Emiliano Zapata—rooting an iconographic symbol that drove the spiritual conviction of his purposeful mural creation. “However brief, it [Rivera’s revolutionary encounter] made a lasting impression, and Rivera came to think more highly of Zapata than of any of the other leaders of the Mexican Revolution” (Richardson 51). As the artist’s biographer, Bertram Wolfe, notes (and as *Zapatista Landscape—The Guerilla*, demonstrates), “‘the admiration for Zapata was to become the core of his revolutionary philosophy for the rest of his life’” [my emphasis] (Richardson 51).

Experiencing only a partial version of the damage caused by the Revolution, he retained only a conceptual image—an image that he then wished into an ideal, left to develop over the next eleven years as he further conceptualized Revolution (Richardson 51).

This abstracted form of Revolution—where the divisions between experience and ideology collapse—is the only constant in Diego Rivera’s polyvalent career, and what I will argue stands behind his art’s contribution to post-revolutionary Mexican renovation. Focusing on

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52 The immortalized image (supplemented by one’s own post-experience, fantastical memory) appears in numerous examples throughout literature and history. Appropriately, Martin Puchner’s *Poetry of the Revolution* explains Marx’s post-mortem commemoration as the proof of this process: “The process of updating and preserving [the manifesto document] intensified after Marx’s death…It is a eulogy for Marx. Now Engels takes great pains to present his dead friend as the sole author of the *Manifesto*…the *Manifesto* becomes Marx’s legacy, his testament, and his memorial” (Puchner 35). Able to construct this “memorial” image by the fact of his real image no longer present, Engel demonstrates the concept I here argue Rivera has performed—where absence of the experience allows memory to conflate the conceptual understanding. For Rivera, and—as history has come to reveal—many others, the immortalization of Emiliano Zapata serves this iconographic purpose, and is widely spread as a legendary symbol of revolution (Brunk 2008; DePalma 1994).
Rivera’s works in these formative years, especially those created outside Mexico’s national borders, I will argue for the presence of a continuity: their unrelenting loyalty to the idea of revolution—not the violent and tragic reality, but a renovated and tamed version—the symbolic product of Mexican muralism’s new mode of reconstructive production. If José Clemente Orozco’s work demonstrates how a spiritual and universal revolutionary order could be brought to the chaotic Mexican context, Rivera’s creation also disseminates this novel identity—this newfound “Mexican Renaissance”—out into the chaotic, international audience (Coffey 4: 2012; Richardson 52). Consequently, the resulting, renovated, and Revolutionary identity was further publicized by Rivera’s art in the global context. His intrepid murals exported the essence of Mexico’s novel individuality, and spread the reputation of its symbolic rebellion to the speculative international eye.

**Case One: Revolutionary Symbolism in the Soviet Union**

After his initial education in Europe as a relative unknown, Rivera spent six influential years in Mexico (1921-1927), gaining a world-renowned reputation as the most important muralist of the new, Mexican School. In 1927, he for the first time went abroad as a recognized figure, invited to the Soviet Union as honorary guest of the Bolshevik government’s 10th anniversary celebration.

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53 See section II of this essay

54 Much has been written about these important years, where Rivera joined the Mexican Communist Party, partnered with David Alfaro Siqueiros in the Sindicato de Obreros, and painted some of his most famous early murals (see Gerry Souter’s *Diego Rivera*, Manuel Aguilar-Moreno and Erika Cabrera’s *Diego Rivera: A Biography*, or Gerald Bywaters’s 1927 article, “Diego Rivera and Mexican Popular Art,” among many others).
Upon Rivera’s arrival in Moscow, Soviet intellectual Alfred Kurella published an article, voicing the artist’s status as pioneer of Mexican Revolution—in art, in lifestyle, and in identity:

Paint murals in clubs and public buildings! This some say, discovery made in America. And that is true. The discovery does indeed come from the New World […] We have them in our midst. Here among us one of the greatest contemporary masters of that kind of work. He the most famous mural painter in all the world, the Mexican artist Diego Rivera. This technical worker in mural paintings—as he calls himself—old revolutionist who has fought, rifle in hand, in the civil war in his own country, also revolutionist in art; revolutionary in his compositions and designs, and, what still better, revolutionary of the masses. He was that initiated that great artistic movement in Mexico. (Wolfe 219) [my emphasis]

The Soviet Union heralded Rivera as soldier, comrade, and even leader. His inflated military background, paired with indigenismo images and rhetoric of unity, all helped characterize the artist as “technical worker” and “revolutionary of the masses.” As the “most famous mural painter in all the world,” he was asked to teach in Moscow—through gallery presentations and lectures displaying the new, and proletariat-centered, artistic production: this “great artistic movement of Mexico” (Richardson 57). He carried all the spotlighted attention warranted by such esteem—becoming the ambassador of this innovative political art, and the face of Mexican national muralism’s symbolic code of revolution.

Once settling into this lofty reception, however, Rivera quickly became disenchanted by the systematizing limitations of the Stalinist regime.55 Outside of politically instituted ideology, Rivera allied himself with the dissident “Octoberist” intellectuals, and published his

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55 Political and artistic enterprises were becoming intertwined; the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhRR) was rising in both popularity and government support, with an ideology restricting creativity to Soviet realism. Despite the group’s revolutionary nomenclature, it became the artistic mouthpiece of the Stalinist government, and would even become the official artistic union of the USSR (the USSR Union of Artists) (“AKhRR”).
disagreement in a well-crafted and contentious editorial. In the Soviet magazine, *Revoliutsiia i kultura (Revolution and Culture)*, he supports:

…a style which will create from painting an excellent, precise, clear and synthetic language, a style which will give the works of art the character of plastically-regular organisms, invested with a deeply human expression, a style which reconciles art with our contemporary industrial life and our socialist economy. Proletarian art must begin to speak a language comprehensible to all the proletarian masses of the world and powerful at the same time to penetrate by cultural means into the capitalist countries, becoming thereby a weapon of exceptional strength in the hands of the communists. (Rivera 1928)

“Proletarian art” here deviates from government propaganda of socialist realism, and instead hints at a revolutionary manifesto of Mexican muralism: the mural as a new technology of production (expressed in the mechanical language of “industrial,” “weapon”), which at once publishes spiritually affective symbolism of glorified rebellion (art as “deeply human expression”). “Proletarian art” employs both of these seemingly contradictory aesthetics—both a living “organism” and a mechanical “weapon of exceptional strength”—in order to power the mural’s (a)effective communication, and to motivate a unifying audience response. This tension defines the “proletariat” production, and drives forward a new and regenerative mode. It is the only means to “reconcile art with our contemporary industrial life” [my emphasis]. A powerful tool for social change, expressively combining spiritual affect and mechanical progress, “proletarian art” opposes the established aesthetic of socialist realism.

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56 The “Octoberists” formed the collective of artists opposing AKhRR ideology, creating instead by a new and technologically self-conscious appropriation of traditional technique, which favored the free expression of the individual artist (Richardson 59-60).

57 Notice Rivera’s use of the collective pronoun “our”—placing himself as one with the industrial, proletariat reality

58 As Williamson summarizes, “It [proletarian art] must create new forms of art, and must educate the proletariat to appreciate these new forms of art. Art was not solely utilitarian, and he [Rivera] rejected the idea that ‘the unformed taste of the esthetically illiterate masses should determine what and how a painter
faithful to the status quo of the Soviet government, Rivera argues for the technology of the Mexican mural manifesto: it speaks through a language that is “synthetic”—dialectically motivated, radically employed, and so, by definition, the manifested Revolution.

Publishing this ideology, Rivera sacrificed his favored place in the Soviet political eye. He had been commissioned to paint for the Red Army Club a mural of nationalistic glorification (in other words, of Soviet political propaganda). He was to base this assignment on the sketches he made during the Bolshevism’s commemorative parade, where the air of unified camaraderie had inspired him to draw the mass of idyllic proletariat figures, marching under the inclusive red banner of communism (Richardson 57) (Figures 5 & 6). The sketches alone glorify revolution in a relatively Soviet-friendly manner; however, Rivera’s controversial Revoliutsiia i kultura publication, along with his growing support of Trotskyism, began positioning the Mexican artist as a disruptive figure vexing to the rule of socialist realism (Apel 64). Despite the initial, and emphatic, support Rivera had enjoyed, his open disagreement with the ruling institutional should paint”” (61). The “synthesis” that Rivera creates is as a combination of purposeful (machine-like) artistic production, but also sees as necessary the installation of the artist’s own humanity—his own connection to spiritual rebellion—which becomes the communicable agent for the (fellow) proletariat masses. Incidentally, this aesthetic combination produces its own novelty that at once expresses, for Rivera, the “excellent,” “precise,” and “reconcile[ing]” symbolic language of revolution.

59 Additional images of these sketches may be found on page 17 of Leah Dickerman’s published collection, “Diego Rivera: Murals for the Museum of Modern Art.”

60 In fact, taken in this context, even the sketches themselves may be interpreted as following this dialectical, “synthetic” aesthetic—and foreshadow how the mural would have proven equally precarious to its Soviet context. The drawings take shape from the combination of Russian history and the novelty: they highlight traditional peasant headscarves with a modern communist red, and old Moscow architecture with armed soldiers and factory workers. Speaking this “synthetic language,” both “comprehensible to the masses” and a “weapon of exceptional strength in the hands of the communists,” they forge reconciliation for the proletariat class, and understand a transitioning reality through the synthetic image of glorified revolution. Along with his article, Rivera’s Red Army mural was to manifest the revolutionary spirit—so positing a kinetic potential for continual change that defied the Stalinist order, and disquieted his strict command.
aesthetic and overall politics made him a source of contention in the strict Stalinist context (Richardson 62). He encountered deliberate roadblocks imposed by his former government patron, and in a rushed attempt to avoid a total falling out, the PCM called him back to Mexico. In May 1928 he abandoned his Red Army Club mural, leaving it unfinished and soon to be destroyed (Richardson 62).

Failing completion, the artwork draws attention as a public statement of activism, and initiates Rivera’s participatory role in symbolic revolution. As his first internationally created mural, it sets a precedent for the artist’s presence abroad, which would repeatedly demonstrate faithfulness to ideological revolution over institutional regime. By publishing the ‘manifesto’ aesthetics of “proletarian art,” the mural defies the USSR’s commission for socialist realism. By exerting this rebellious government criticism, it shapes Rivera’s an international reputation as one committed to Revolutionary art. And finally, in doing so, it firmly links the creation of codified revolution to the aesthetic identity of Mexico.

**Case Two: New York’s Rockefeller Mural, and the Education of Iconic Revolution**

Rivera’s second “failed” international performance marks one of the most notable examples of manifesto mural technology. In 1933, the Rockefeller Center scandal spoke to the global proletariat, and in the end further disseminated a reputation for Mexico of symbolic Revolution. As the Rockefeller building rose in New York City—a monument to capitalism’s success—the fame of Diego Rivera similarly rose in the United States context (Litwin 83). Just completing “Detroit Industry” and in the wake of this commission, was recruited by the Rockefeller family to materialize the assigned theme, “Man at the crossroads, looking with
uncertainty but with hope to a better world” (Rivera 1933). His interpretation—*Man at the Crossroads* (1933)—presents “a richly interconnected multi-space, multi-time composition drawing together all levels of human knowledge and existence […] based on axial dualities” (Apel 59) (Figure 7). It on one side presents the world of communism, and on the other, the world of capitalism, positing the individual worker “at the crossroads” of this cosmic collision. The mural represents dialectical Revolution as the opening toward universal and revolutionary redefinition, and in this scope, calls the attention of a globally interested audience.  

61Rivera had painted a series of murals depicting the industrial success of Detroit’s automobile manufacturing (Ford Motor Company). However, controversy surrounded the works, as they were either praised as genius, or scorned for their fidelity to Marxist and indigenous ideology (“Rivera Court”).

62This image is actually the mural, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, which Rivera was forced to (re)create from this original Rockefeller piece, after the latter was destroyed before completion.

63Chapter III of this thesis explains how catastrophically colliding spaces empower the opportunity for self definition (theorized in Lefebvre’s “space of catastrophe”), and presents Orozco’s *Hombre en llamas* as iconographic Revolution, the example of newly coded identity. For this Rivera mural, also, transition is represented as the space of opportunity.

The mural was conceived during a global time of crisis: the Great Depression in the U.S., the Soviet famine under Stalin’s tightening control, and the rising power of Hitler’s appointed chancellorship. Its series of cosmic dualities address this internationally shared, catastrophic context, widening a universal focus to “contrast the physical properties of the microcosm and macrocosm while commenting on the political duality of capitalism and socialism” (Apel 59). Ethereal images of galaxies and surreal magnifications of microbes form an “x”-like super-structure, dividing the image into two distinct worlds (left as socialism, right as communism [Rivera 1933]). Mythical legends stand on equal footing with historical figures (i.e. Zeus in the upper right, with Charles Darwin painted directly below). Through the center, a crystal sphere of mysticism forms part of a complex machinery of steel, both growing up from the organic fertility of the natural Earth. Likewise, the micro/macro-leveled “x”—both supporting and dividing the mural’s framework—attaches to this machine, as a cosmic-yet-mechanical propeller moving through these critical crossroads. Here at the mural’s center, “all levels of human knowledge and existence” intersect (Apel 59). Reality climaxes in this tension of oppositional forces—where physicality meets spirituality—where modern machines meet antiquity—and where paradox both tears and fuses the mural construction. At the mural’s center, at the heart of the chaotic intersection, stands “man as a skilled worker” (Apel 59). In command of the cosmic control board, he is empowered to shape his own identity—defined by this formative role, and propelled towards a reconciled future by the combination of these cataclysmic crossroads.

Rivera, like Orozco, therefore represents the catastrophic, revolutionary space as that of individual self-realization. Unlike Orozco, however, this New York-painted mural works in an international context, and addresses a cosmic-scaled catastrophe—addressing a universal working class, and drawing attention beyond just the Mexican audience.
If history is destined to repeat, Rivera’s Rockefeller performance does, indeed, fall in line with its cosmic scope. Just 5 years after the *incompletion* of the artist’s Red Army mural, another outburst of outrage detained the Rockefeller production—and the dualistic confrontation of its imagery was repeated in its reception as cultural artifact. From the wall, Vladimir Lenin’s sketched face stared into a deeply capitalist context, in sharp contradiction to the economic system that had built the walls he now adorned. The mural received total retaliation: Rivera claimed that Lenin had been included in the approved plan, while the Rockefellers retorted that the artist had “tried to put over a fast one” (Rivera 1933). After negotiations failed between artist and patron—and after protests and publications from every side—the scandal ended in another international commission that went from incompletion to destruction (Apel 57).

Rivera might have learned from his Soviet encounter. To salvage desperately needed funding, he might have toed the careful line of patron appeasement in New York. But he did not. Instead, he chose to revolt intentionally. “A [necessary] closer look at the RCA mural” reveals what he *does* learn from his experience in the USSR: an even more developed aesthetic of how to perform this rebellion (Apel 59). The dualities within the mural froth around a “man at the crossroads,” presented with the choice that will define him, of either capitalism or socialism. Hyperbolic mockery scorns the path to capitalism; however, even the road of socialism appears tainted with a cancer of Stalinism (Apel 60). Yet on the socialist side, the controversial image of Lenin joins the hands of workers from many races, with a communist fist raised behind him in the background. The same exalted figures Rivera had sketched in Moscow’s Bolshevik celebration here reappear. Again as one mob, dressed in a revolutionary “vivid red,” and

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64 In fact, even though Stalin is at this time, the only world leader of an officially communist government, he remains totally absent from the mural.
positioned in front of Lenin’s tomb, they celebrate the martyred figure of Lenin as a revolutionary hero-made-legend (Rivera 1933) (Figure 8). Denying faithfulness to either of the combatting social structures presented, the mural here instead forms an aesthetic that exalts the immortalized image of Lenin, and finds unified reconciliation in his icon of revolution.

In New York, this universally socialist aesthetic elicits its own controversial reception—demonstrating a revolutionary identity that can, by aesthetics, only be symbolized. As the work’s detention motivates protests from the left, it teaches through the formative performance of its own ideology—characteristic to the manifesto mural production. Just as colliding social spaces empower the choice of the worker within the image to realize his own identity, this mural positions art against its surrounding society—propelling the unified definition of an international proletariat. Influenced by the dual rebellion of the Rockefeller mural—its rivaling paradoxes in imagery, and its controversial defiance in reception—the real-life worker is likewise positioned at the crossroads, projected to follow the immortal identity that Lenin here represents.

As the socialist performance crosses the road of its capitalist context, it naturally collides—spreading notoriety of its contradictory nature, and publicizing the revolutionary

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65 In the same way that Emilio Zapata had been made into a legendary myth of pure revolution (see note 2), Lenin had died less than two years after establishing the Soviet Union, and consequently also been raised to this level of symbolic existence (Krausz 2015; Theen 1973). Whereas, in Mexico, Rivera plays with the immortalized image of Zapata (see his 1931 mural Agrarian Leader Zapata), he here employs the image of Lenin, in order to reach a more international audience. However, in both instances, he remains faithful to immortalized image of revolution, as it appears through the face of a rebellious leader, who has been raised in the cultural eye as representative of revolution itself.

66 Rivera paints in the international context with the same socially productive purpose that his art worked in Mexico, to demonstrate for the working class its own identity:

For the last twenty years I have thought that the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat had need of its own artistic expression...Furthermore, it is highly important to create a class taste...for the clarification of his class position and strengthening of his confidence and determination to struggle. With this aim, my comrades and I painted in Mexico...Therefore, it became desirable that we test our theories among the workers of the United States (Rivera 1933). [my emphasis]
identity of the nation its author represents. *The New York Times* article headlines from the era include titles such as “Rivera a Mexican Who Expresses Mexico,” “Artist Bans Compromise. Says Work is ‘Assassinated’—Defends Depiction of Lenin as Mankind’s Leader,” and “Rivera Says His Art is Red Propaganda; He Came to the United States to Advance the Cause of the Proletariat, He Admits” (Carey)(“Artist Bans Compromises”)(“Rivera Says”). “The most outspoken and respected of the Mexican mural painters,” Rivera represents his symbolically renovated nation with the freedom of a social activist, and yet is bound only to the ideology of his own, personal, rebellion (Dent 175). His fame as an artist positioned him as ambassador to represent Mexico abroad—and with this opportunity, he internationally builds a reputation of performative, iconic Revolution.

Conclusion

Diego Rivera is a notorious genius. Although known as the “Legendary Mexican Painter,” he also remains infamous as intellectual and political chameleon—emphasizing indigenous symbols despite his family’s wealthy class status and formative education in Europe, and fluctuating through contradictory political affiliations (the *Sindicato de Orbreros Técnicos*

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67 Rivera had been ousted from the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) in 1929, and the Rockefeller mural has consequently been characterized as a self-conscious attempt to justify the artist’s place in the organization (Linsley 48). However, he believed himself an independent and revolutionary worker, accepting the mural’s theme “only on condition that they [Rockefellers] would give me [Rivera] full liberty to paint as I saw fit” (Rivera 1933). Having been burned by the PCM and disillusioned by Stalinism, and restricted by U.S. capitalism and its commercial bourgeois, he distrusts blind, institutional affiliation. Floating free of associations, he instead claims: “I am one man who works for my own interests, and my interests are the interests of my [proletariat] class” (Apel 61). Although he battled the practicality of living as a revolutionary while still accepting bourgeois patrons, his mural methodology demonstrates this proletarian fidelity—viewed by the artist as a technology critical in the dissemination of revolutionary ideology (Apel 59):

The role of the artist…is not that of the fellow traveller; it is not that of the sympathizer; it is not that of a servant of the revolution—the role of the artist is that of a soldier of the revolution. (Rivera 1933)
and PCM in Mexico, Octoberists and Trotskyism in Russia, and controversial capitalist patrons in the United States) (Litwin)(Richardson 51-60). Strict criticism of the artist’s paradoxes, however, unproductively ignores his artistic consistency, missing his works’ crucial fidelity to the idea of revolution. In each international case outlined above—and even in the artist’s own Mexican context—this loyalty manifests both aesthetic and performative Revolution.

Propelled by the energy of their contradiction, Rivera’s murals spurned institutionalized culture with the

68 Rivera’s Mexican murals represent the most hyperbolized claims of indigenismo, despite his elite family history, and extensive educational training abroad (see Triumph of the Revolution, 1926; “The Perpetual Renewal of the Revolutionary Struggle, 1926; “The History of Mexico, 1929”). Experiencing only a short moment of the long and tumultuous revolutionary Mexican history, and perhaps feeling a desire to compensate for his time abroad and away from it, the erudite artist clings still more strongly to what he claims “Mexican classicism” (“Rivera Is Painting Museum Frescos” 1931)—the purest and highest, truly Mexican aesthetic, based in indigenous symbols. However, as he battles the desire to go even beyond the unification of a national proletariat, these same three murals above mentioned also feature multiracial characters (or simply hide all race-revealing features). They share the uniformity of mass workers, seen also in Rivera’s “Detroit Industry,” and—though years before his work in the United States—linking their symbolism to a consistent desire on the part of the artist: to unify internationally on the grounds of a revolutionary, working identity.

69 Back in Mexico City in 1934, Rivera demonstrated once more this revolutionary fidelity. In the Palacio de Bellas Artes, he recreated his Rockefeller masterpiece, this time naming it, “Man, Controller of the Universe” (Bravo). Although some have coined the restitution merely Rivera’s “artistic revenge” (Apel 70), a number of crucial alterations were made from the original, “the significance of [which] … cannot be overlooked” (70). Most importantly, Rivera added an emphatic tribute to Leon Trotsky, openly painting the anti-Soviet artist with a red Communist banner (Apel 70). As Rivera had already been dismissed from the Communist party—“automatically cut off from the masses whose life and aspirations furnished him not only with the themes of his murals but with that faith and purpose which are indispensable to great art” (Evens 22)—his direct support of Leon Trotsky would bar all hope of re-entry to the PCM (at least for now). Rivera did later petition to rejoin; however, at this point in 1934, David Alfaro Siqueiros—heavily involved in the PCM, and its Secretary General through the 1950s and ‘60s (Briggs 173)—hated Trotsky, and even later attempted his assassination [Stein 121]). Still further, Rivera added to the mural a group of Trotsky supporters, suffering under the attack of Mexican police (Apel 70). The intentional addition of such controversial political imagery therefore entered a social context that was “hardly a ‘safe’ locale for this new version of the mural” (Apel 70). Distrusting opposition to both the PCM and the official Mexican government, he instead chose Trotskyism—the only ideology manifesting truly revolutionary iconography. In 1938, he would publish in Mexico the manifesto of Trotskyism—Manifesto por un arte revolucionario independiente—in which the dialectical revolution identifying the Man at the Crossroads is summarized in “Independent Revolutionary Art:” “verdadero arte…que no se satisface con las variaciones sobre modelos establecidos, sino que se esfuerza por expresar las necesidades íntimas del hombre…no puede dejar de ser revolucionario, es decir, no puede sino apirar a una reconstrucción completa y radical de la sociedad” (Breton, Trotsky, Rivera).
weaponry of erudite artistic revolution; as their production reified this revitalized image, they solidified an iconic rebellion—raising conflict itself as tame, idealized symbolism. Then, renowned internationally as the ambassador of his nation, Rivera presented this iconographic revolution as the example of Mexican identity. He performed globally the muralism that renovated revolution in the national context, and with these charged manifestos, disseminated worldwide a local, ideological, identity of Mexican Revolution.

Figure 4. Zapatista Landscape—La Guerrilla (1915)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true#
Figure 5. *Moscow Sketches* (1928)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Figure 6. *Moscow Sketches* (1928)

https://www.flickr.com/photos/20302464@N07/15698367550

Figure 7. *Man, Controller of the Universe* (1934)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccesslibraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Figure 8. *Man, Controller of the Universe* (1934)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Mexican Muralism represents a truly “Revolutionary” art. It developed—through what we may coin the “manifesto mural”—a new mode of artistic and social production. It installed—with this innovative technology—the affective spiritual codification of Revolution. It disseminated—with international performance—the individuality of this unique and novel identity. All three Grandes pictorialized a utopian, communist Revolution that was universal in scope, but that never firmly materialized in the institution of the Mexican State (despite the claims otherwise, and made clear in the paradoxical name of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional). As Mary K. Coffey brings to light, even the mural itself was adopted by government establishment, “through the institutional apparatus of the museum” (20). Ironically, the very technology designed for revolution became instead a systemized “technique of didactic museology and, as such, a technique of exercising power” (20).

What then, if anything, did the Mexican Muralists accomplish? Were all their utopic intentions wasted, even destructive, when appropriated by the ruling government institution? This is the underlying question that this thesis has sought to answer, and the reason for focusing my analysis to the critical years when the muralist movement began. Coffey’s analysis brilliantly studies the reification of the mural manifesto—the institutional adoption of a technology designed to influence and to construct. However, her work focuses on the latter half of the mural movement, from about 1934-1968; I addressed the mural’s role before the government “museumification”—during the crucial years that generated the product later to be institutionally appropriated.
In order to address this large-scale phenomenon in a manageable way, I have limited this thesis to study only Los Tres Grandes: David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera. However, now by way of conclusion, I would like to briefly contrast the work Rufino Tamayo. Working primarily as an easel painter during the 1920s mural “boom,” and only later in 1933, painting his first mural, Tamayo from the start differed from the other aforementioned artists (“Rufino Tamayo”). In fact, government affiliations, abstract aesthetics, and ideological convictions all position him as a stark comparison to the Tres Grandes’ didactic and purposefully revolutionary, socially-minded murals.

Tamayo accepted his first administrative position in 1921, as head of the Departamento de Dibujo Etnográfico del Museo Nacional de Arqueología de México; in 1928, he began teaching as professor at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes; and in 1932, he was appointed director of the Departamento de Artes Plásticas de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (“Rufino Tamayo b. 1899”). With a career so clearly marked by engagement with the government, his art shaped a differing aesthetic from the murals of the contemporaneous Grandes, even openly rejected their art born of oppositional ideological convictions. Fernando Fabio Sanchez writes, in Artful Assassins: Murder as Art in Modern Mexico:

A break took place within the Mexican intelligentsia […] orchestrated by Rufino Tamayo…namely, the merging of modernism with social nationalism. One of Tamayo’s intentions […] was to resist the ‘tyranny of muralism.’ [Tamayo’s murals] attempt to provide an all-encompassing interpretation of the Mexican circumstance, ableit using avant-garde techniques…In Mexico de Hoy (Mexico Today), instead of multitudes of people and a chronological representation of the national past, we find abstract, geometrical shapes that represent modern buildings; instead of countrysides and fields, we find machinery and science: the city. (103-104)

Tamayo’s rejection of the Grandes muralists is revealed even further by his two most famous murals: México de Hoy (1953) and Nacimiento de la Nacionalidad (1952) (Figures 9 &
The works are similar in style—both commissioned interpretations for the Palacio de Belles Artes (in other words, with government sponsorship). Painted in abstract, geometric shapes, and bolds strokes and colors, they both purposefully move away from the “Mexican aesthetic” that had been developed in the formative years of the muralist movement (Salus 7). They move to shift public arts’ content, from “multitudes of people,” and the “representation of the national past,” to “abstract, geometrical shapes that represent modern buildings,” and “machinery and science.” The artist moved away from the Revolutionary social unity of Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera, and distanced himself from a collective (communist) message. He instead presented the international influence of vanguard, depicting the industry of technological progress, rather than Proletarian Revolution (Sánchez 7).70

Sanquéz groups Tamayo’s two most famous murals together, under their mutual purpose of “merging modernism with social nationalism” (7). However, although they share this ideology (and so purposefully contradict the social vision performed in prior muralism), each mural also speaks with an individually specific, corrective imagery. México de Hoy is painted between two of the Palacio de Belles Artes’ impressive standing columns; using these pillars to divide the mural in three distinct sections, the work is specifically designed to interact with its architecture. As the centerpiece of this structure—where the audience eye is first drawn by the edifice/aesthetic interaction—there burns a flaming male figure. Surrounding him, geometric pieces of machinery stretch in elongated, grey forms. The image alludes to Hombre en Llamas,

70 In fact, El nacimiento de nuestra nacionalidad even further grounds Mexico in international (European) roots—painting the “birth of our nation” with the Greek figures of Perseus and Pegasus (Sánchez 104).
analyzed in Chapter 3 of this thesis as one of José Clemente Orozco’s most famous and influential paintings of Revolutionary iconography. I reprise section two of this thesis:

Orozco’s 1929 *Hombre en Llamas* stains the yawning dome of Guadalajara’s *Hospicio Cabañas* with the deep red of war-torn upheaval. A blazing body scorches the mural’s center, whose fiery background further marks an atmosphere of tragedy and chaos. The spectators rimming the bottom of the painting are fraught, elongated figures—grey and sinister as they gaze up at the ardent figure. Yet, while the depicted ruin is evident, the mural at once also signals an unmistakable new life. The body rises through the flames, transcending in an inspirational and upward movement that arrives at the welcomed area of new self. Forming an organically intertwined circuit around the mural’s rim, the strained figures likewise coalesce as one unit. Their bodies become indistinguishable as one connecting portal, with faces together pulled upwards in awe—all in support of the transcendent, ardent body. The mural as product thus speaks back to its mode of production; the nature of the space reflects the character of that which forms it. Painting revolution as revival, the image broadcasts renovation—where a new social organization is made possible through catastrophe, as itself the catalyst to collective spiritual identity.

A mural technically painted for architectural interaction. A figure in rising in flames. Stretched grey figures, surrounding the portal of inauguration. Tamayo’s *Mexico de Hoy* is in unmistakable conversation with Orozco’s *Hombre en Llamas*—as these very specific defining qualities, in fact, specifically describe both of the expansive murals. Yet, Tamayo’s elongated figures are not men, but shapes; the way of passage is not circular (the organic symbol of both spiritual wholeness and feminine birth), but square (the edificial doorpost marking man’s physical and technological construction); and neither the mural’s European, not pre-hispanic, references focus on the influences’ spirituality, but rather, simply their “elementos arquitectónicos” (“Symbols”) (“Murales” 20). Whereas Orozco paints the pathos of

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71 Although I have found no study thus far that makes this explicit connection between *México de Hoy* and *Hombre en Llamas*, Juan Carlos Pereda, in his *Artes de México* article “Orozco, Tamayo, Izquierdo: Tres pasiones fraguadas en rojo” (2013), does connect Orozco and Tamayo through the color red.

72 The mural does contain indigenous and European allusions: the Paclacio de Bellas Artes describes the center mural structure as “un edificio que fusiona elementos arquitectónicos europeos y prehispánicos” (“Murales” 2).
transcendent redemption—emphatic in the unified identity of Revolution, Tamayo repaints this image—correcting its spiritual prominence to detachment, and its national investment to abstraction.

This corrective process has precedent in another famous work by Tamayo, Nacimiento de la Nacionalidad. Described as “un encuentro de dos mundos que, tras la muerte y la destrucción, hacen surgir una nueva realidad,” the mural converges on the same dialectical axis that Rivera had painted in Man, Controller of the Universe (“Murales” 18). In the center of both murals, a man is placed in the position of control (for Rivera, the machine of social change; for Tamayo, the horse of a conquistador) (“Murales” 18). Also in both, Greco-Roman ruins adorn the top left corner. Adorning both bottom-center sections, the process of generation and new life point to a vision of the future (for Rivera: the image is a growing garden; for Tamayo: an indigenous woman giving birth). And yet, Tamayo paints in the abstract cubism, again showing a mending attitude toward the Rivera’s didactic realism. His “controlling” central figure controls nature rather than society (a less dangerous message for a government all-too-familiar with charismatic Caudillos). And finally, the depicted newborn is “un bebé a la vez blanco y moreno, una imagen que remite al mestizaje;” in other words, the new social vision—although, like Rivera’s, results from a dialectical “encuentro de dos mundos”—returns to a racial-biological definition, rather than a social one of class-consciousness and sympathy towards communism (“Murales” 18).

Although Tamayo “rejected the didactic and ideological/propagandistic style of the muralists,” in both Mexico de Hoy and Nacimiento de la nacionalidad, he employs their form (Dent 272). Though uninvested in political “propaganda,” which belabors its message through

73 “a meeting between two worlds that, through death and destruction, brings about a new reality”

74 “a baby at the once white and black, an image that refers to the mestizo”
the “tyranny of muralism,” he ironically wields this didactic tool, and with it teaches a government-corroborated lesson.75

Tamayo’s reinterpretation might appear marginal to a discussion of the other artists’ early productions. However, his engagement with these proves the importance of the initial mural manifests: it proves, first, that the early stages of the Mexican mural movement posed such an influential performative mode, that it prompted Tamayo’s didactic appropriation; and, second, that this mode was revolutionary enough to be institutionally dangerous. It was therefore, by an institutionalized artist like Tamayo, abstractly rewritten.

Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera shaped muralism as a performative tool that was also intentionally Revolutionary. It repeatedly superseded its government or private patrons,76 without the institutional loyalty later identified by Mary Coffey’s process of “museumification.” Though they failed to unite the utopic society they envisioned, their role is undeniable in post-revolutionary social definition. They inaugurated the icon of a reconciled Revolution, which—despite much retaliation from institutional authorities—worked as an agent of reconstruction. Their manifesto-projected reality presented to the healing nation a defined value even more elevated than racial distinction, and even more spiritual than political affiliation. At the same time, the mural’s very essence of regenerative novelty aimed to counter the reality of violent, tragic loss. Only through the symbolic elevation of revolutionary identity could Octavio Paz later claim for Mexico a similarly timeless and geographically limitless individuality—whose

75 *Mexico de Hoy* (1953) and *Nacionamiento de la Nacionalidad* (1952), were realized at the end of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines’s presidency—an era marked by booming aspirations in the growth of industry and trade (Coerver 12).

76 For Siqueiros, in *La Escuela Nacional*; for Rivera, in both Moscow and New York
Mexican citizens “cada día modela más el país a su imagen” (2). The Mexican identity to which Paz refers is this validated and regenerative Revolution: valid because it uniquely is the Mexicans’ “own image;” regenerative because it empowers with a productive ability, providing the inspired motivation of “shaping the nation.”

77 “every day they are shaping the nation more and more into their own image”

78 He defines Mexicans as the “grupo concreto, constituido por esos que…tienen conciencia de su ser en tanto que mexicanos” (“specific group made up of those who are conscious of themselves…as Mexicans”) (2). In other words, “Mexicans” do not inhabit a physical area, but a conceptual ability. In the context of this famous chapter, El Pachuco y otros extremos, Paz defines this identifying awareness as an internal struggle—an identity paradoxically stationed in transition, in the conflicting realm of “adolescence.” In other words, it is an identity of categorical Revolution.
Figure 9. México de hoy (1953)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true

Figure 10. Nacimiento de la nacionalidad (1952)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true#
Appendix A

Women in Post-Revolutionary Mexico: Who paints as ‘Revolutionary’? Who paints revolutionarily?

This thesis has argued a Revolutionary iconography established by the Mexican Mural Movement, and the resulting claim to identity that helped coalesce a unified nation. However, I have woven throughout the subtext a discussion that probes the heavily gendered implementation of this movement; now, in this appendix, I aim to give this topic its due attention, and explicitly address the salient questions surrounding it. What role did gender norms play in the mural manifestos of Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera? Are women excluded from the summoned working group of “revolutionaries”? The artists lived in a culture already heavy with gendered social expectations; with the opportunity to paint yet another manifestation of Revolution, what motivation would they have to maintain structured norms?

If art in post-revolutionary Mexico projected a new social organization, then gender roles within this society are best addressed through a gender-comprehensive analysis of this cultural production. In other words, examining not only the Tres Grandes’ projective depiction of women—but also their reception of contemporaneous female artists—will better indicate whether or not they accepted a normative-changing artistic influence. Further, we must necessarily also question the assumption that this means of production was itself gendered. These relationships could be studied in a separate and extended thesis of its own right; but the appendix that follows hopes to probe these topics with innovative comparisons, and open the discussion for other scholars to continue this very important—and largely undocumented—aspect of Mexico’s formative post-revolutionary years. Starting with the question “Who contributed to the post-revolutionary culture?”, I examine the precedent of Mexican women’s participation
(addressing, in the process, a discussion in historiography), and use as example the female painter, María Izquierdo. Then, through the life of Frida Kahlo, I look at the reception of women in the intellectual arena; which, finally, will point back to the accomplishments of the Mexican muralists movement—not only as painted by *Los Grandes*, but also, now recognized, by the revolutionary women.

**Precedent of Intellectual Production**

To contextualize, we may first review the role of women intellectuals in pre-revolutionary Mexico, both in social practice and historical ideology. The precedent of Mexican female intellectuals, in fact, has a long and expansive history. As Cordelia Candelaria writes in her review of Anna Macías’s “Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940,”

> Many contemporary feminists would be surprised to know that feminism in the western hemisphere antedates the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolution" of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention on women's suffrage, for this "Declaration" is often perceived as the start of feminism in the New World... The writings of Mexico's most renowned Colonial poet and thinker, Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695), [however], addressed such important feminist concerns as the sexual double standard and the need for universal education of women nearly two centuries before the convention in Seneca Falls... As Sor Juana, she produced what is acknowledged to be the greatest Spanish lyric verse of the period and also the first known feminist tract in modern times, *Response to Sor Filotea* (1691)... As the example of Sor Juana suggests, Mexico has contributed more to the subject of gender disparity than machismo (extreme male dominance) and hembrismo (extreme female submission). (88)

Recognizing and protesting its society’s “sexual double standard,” and advocating “the need for universal education of women,” Sor Juana’s art exemplifies distinguished intellectual activism—revolutionary leadership for social change, regardless of gender and era. But this woman is not an anomaly on the front lines of change. Anna Macía, to again reference her research, dedicates her book’s first chapter to the “organized feminist movement” that responded
to the regimes of Benito Juarez and Porfirio Diaz (Candelaria 89). In the realm of artistic and intellectual production, then, we may trace the well-established history of women pioneering rebellion, even long before the male-dominated combat of the physical Revolution.

Despite this indisputable involvement, contemporaneous culture, media, and even popular historiography, has overlooked this feminine participation in leading intellectual activism. Instead, the Mexican female has been commonly imagined—and even documented—as either weak and submissive, or sexually manipulative and destructive.79 Alicia Arrión laments:

the current popular representation of Adelita80, a product of consumerism and the exploitation of the female body, preserves nothing of her feminist spirit. Instead, the portrayal of Adelita in her revolutionary ensemble is sexualized and objectified. As an object of desire and erotic pleasure, Adelita is a commercial commodity. (108)

In her review of Elizabeth Salas’s *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History*, Asuncion Lavrin adds to the argument, demonstrating that scholarship needs:

a clear demarcation between the warring *soldadera* and the wife-lover who looks after her man. The distinction is important, as one plays an active and defiant role, while the other follows a more socially stereotyped one. (229)

However, as Anne Rubenstein summarizes, Jocelyn Olcott rounds this image, demonstrating how Mexican women have—on equal ground with the men—participated in the intellectual struggle of revolution: with all its accomplishments and failures, all its ideological


80 The immortalized figure of the woman revolutionary soldier, now a cultural icon in a myriad of media manifestations
dreams and practical implementations, and the entire, influential process of shaping

“revolutionary citizenship:”

Olcott paints a complex picture. The activists she studies sometimes succeeded in setting the national agenda, but more often - especially around the crucial issue of votes for women - they failed. They sometimes focused their efforts on bringing practical improvements to most women's daily lives, but sometimes their energies went into more abstract causes, and sometimes their issues had little or no obvious gender component. Sometimes these activists opposed elements of the national government or its local representatives, and sometimes they were eager to declare their affiliation with one or the other or both. Eventually, all this contradictory detail coalesces into Olcott's underlying argument about "revolutionary citizenship" as a "contingent, inhabited, and gendered" practice (p. 25) - a process rather than a thing. (236)

It is from this platform that I will jump to examine the rich work of who I will call an “artist soldadera,” with the important recognition that she built upon a strong precedent of subjugated—but therefore, all the more ‘revolutionary’—intellectual female and social participation. By doing so, I address questions of both methodology and analytical content: both challenging the representation that all Mexican women passively received a patriarchal social norm, and providing a framework to understand the male artists’ interaction with the female (in both physical person and symbolic form).

María Izquierdo

María Izquierdo exemplifies the intellectual pioneer, overlooked in her agency of social interaction, but advocate for the Mexican woman’s inclusion in recognized participation. Her own biography begins with mistreatment as a fourteen-year-old child, married unwillingly to an army colonel, and forced to mechanically “produc[e] three children in rapid succession” (Pomade). Yet, demonstrating bravery even in her youth, she enrolled in the Academia de San Carlos, at age twenty-one, when her family moved to Mexico City. Here, she began developing
her natural artistic talent, working closely with two key mentors: Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo. Each one represented an oppositional side to the rising aesthetic debate in Mexico—with Rivera standing for the socio-politically invested mural aesthetic, and Tamayo opting for a European-inspired abstract surrealism (movement which would form a group of intellectuals known as the Contemporáneos). As Izquierdo began to improve her painting, both opposing men aimed to adopt her as object of his possession, and student promoter of his aesthetic school. Rivera had already taken upon himself responsibility to write her art as “indigenous”, and Rufino Tamayo shared his studio with her at the academy (Zavala 71)(Deffebach 29). As Andriana Zavala summarizes:

In Rivera’s descriptions of Izquierdo’s work, he was “claiming” her for his side in the debate over Mexican art. In 1928, Rufino Tamayo had asserted, ‘Mexicanism has been interpreted only folklorically and archaeologically, having more to do with anecdote than essence.’ Just returned from New York, Tamayo declared himself a supporter of French painting, “particularly the work of Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and de Chirico.” In condemning ‘foreign painting,’ Rivera was no doubt aware of the interest it was generating anew among some Mexican artists. (71)

As scholarship has interpreted, the young female artist was at this stage a pawn in her two mentor’s battle of ego and ideology.\(^{81}\) This view, however, again structures Izquierdo into decisive and expected gender roles; it is a one-dimensional historiography, which reduces all complexities of the mentor/mentee relationship to the prejudice of masculine dominance. All

\(^{81}\) Adriana Zavala’s chapter on Maria Izquierdo falls into this easy analysis, despite the fact that it is a well-researched and useful study, contributing to Izquierdo’s life and work. She writes: “His [Rivera’s] description of Izquierdo as physically attractive in her “classically Mexican” (i.e. mestiza) appearance…points to the fact that ‘Mexicanness’ for him was not just rooted in traditional culture but sustained by the normative patriarchal gender roles evident in his painting” (71). Does Rivera’s attraction to the “classically Mexican” automatically assume that “Mexicanness” is equal to tradition? “Traditional culture,” in this case, would refer to the “mestiza”—i.e. post-colonial encounter. However, for Rivera, “traditional culture” is rooted even farther back, in indigenismo. Which “patriarchal gender roles” are then automatically included, when Zavala’s analysis emphasizes a “traditional culture” that Rivera, himself, would have itself seen as “non-classically Mexican”?\(^{81}\)
intentions of Rivera and Tamayo aside, it fails to realize that Izquierdo, though undoubtedly influenced by these men, was at once mutually influential, and herself a shaping agent in the development of these relationships.\textsuperscript{82}

Ironically, Izquierdo first displays this instrumental social participation when she first exhibits her art, at the Galeria de Arte Moderno in 1929. Her appearance at the show had been a joint effort with Diego Rivera, who even wrote an article promoting the depth of her creativity.\textsuperscript{83} However, both students and administrative majority were “infuriated” (Pomade) by the new academic director’s emphatic support of the young female artist. Although he delivered two of three lectures justifying the merit of her art, Rivera never had the chance to finish the series; less than one year after the scandal, the artworld-deity himself was forced to resign his academic position (Deffebach 28). In this sense, rather than helplessly possessed as a trinket of personal promotion, Izquierdo, in fact, pioneered for Rivera this break from institutional affiliations (a trend that I argued also of Rivera, as partial evidence of his “Revolutionary” commitment)—and provided, by her own leading first example, artistry apart from this academic endorsement.\textsuperscript{84}

Neither was Izquierdo decisively whipped in the choice of her ideology and aesthetic. In 1929, when she broke from institutional structure, she was at once pulled by the two key figures of Mexico’s disparaging socio-ideological currents (as previously mentioned, Rivera on one side, and Tamayo on the other). Though the most famous and obvious choice of continued ally would

\textsuperscript{82} Of course, there are places—and even perhaps more of them than not—where Rivera and Tamayo align with structured genders norms, and wrongly view women as weak, as objects, as confined to certain social norms, etc. My argument, however, is that we have \textit{reified and enforced} these wrong social standards, by, in fact, continually ignoring the evidential moments when individuals have broken outside them.

\textsuperscript{83} Diego Rivera, “María Izquierdo,” \textit{El Universal}, September 25, 1929.

\textsuperscript{84} See chapter III of this thesis
of course have been Rivera, Izquierdo joined Rufino Tamayo and the other Contemporáneos—creating, even by that choice alone, a decisive and socially revolutionary statement. Further, her choice would prove to be prophetic: the “Grandes” gradually lost government sponsorship throughout the 1930s, and Tamayo, instead, occupied the official roles of cultural legislation (“Rufino Tamayo b. 1899”). Predicting the movement of the conflicted political/aesthetic arena, and even acting preemptively (securing its realization?), she interacted as her own agent, and became a participating member in the shift of popular “Mexican” art (Zavala 71).

María Izquierdo’s life continued in the turmoil with which it had started: she again married, and again divorced; she suffered from paralysis and the complications of sickness, and—now enemies with Rivera—was stripped of her only mural commission, by the complaints of her former teacher and his (again compatriot) David Alfaro Siqueiros (Pomade). Despite, and perhaps because of, these challenges, she lived and painted revolutionarily. Although scholarly recognition has not entirely seen her influence in art—only her struggle through it—she, in fact, define new roles for the Mexican woman—roles not yet culturally recognized, but soon to be exemplarily redefined by both her art and life.

**Frida Kahlo**

María Izquierdo’s life proved “revolutionary” social participation on the part of the female intellectual artist. I now turn to study Frida Kahlo, to probe the reception of such feminine participation—especially of the part of Diego Rivera.

Kahlo first donned her now-iconographic, traditionally indigenous dress on the day she married Rivera, in 1929—“testifying to her sustained devotion to revolutionary

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85 Presumably for her shift in ideology and affiliations
ideas…embody[ing] what the revolutionary leaders preached, and personify[ing] a nation in transition” (Block 11). Whereas María Izquierdo, as we know, was in this year transitioning more and more towards Rufino Tamayo and Contemporáneos ideology, Kahlo instead proves her commitment to Rivera’s revolutionary and indigenismo aesthetic (Block 11). Much has already been written about the couple’s tumultuous romantic relationship; undoubtedly, their standing as lovers influenced the ideological development of each individual as an artist.\footnote{Alcántara, Isabel, and Sandra Egnolff. Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Munich: Prestel, 1999. Print.; Prignitz-Poda, Helga. Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera: Mexican Modern Art. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Incorporated, 2015. Print.; Herrera, Hayden. Frida, a Biography of Frida Kahlo. New York: Harper & Row, 1983. Print.} However, despite this emotionally complicated posture towards Kahlo, Rivera’s disposition is telling of his complicated and inconsistent reception of the feminine movement. He sees her as lover, mother figure, and indigenous goddess (see Pan American Unity, 1940, and Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central, 1947); but also student, and strong-willed painter (Distribution of Arms, 1928). Taking Kahlo under his direction—while at once falling under her own strong influence—he reacts in fear of female participation, and demonstrates motivation for the increasingly problematic installation of a social systemic patriarchy (Welch).

Rivera had been painting with invested motivation for years before meeting Kahlo, and so already was immersed in his own political and artistic convictions. Having been the most internationally recognized ambassador of the Mexican mural movement, and its newly iconized identity of Revolution, he carried a self-appointed responsibility to “create new forms of art, and educate the proletariat to appreciate these new forms” (Williamson 61). With this drive, he had looked to train the young artists of the Academia de San Carlos; with this drive, he had chosen María Izquierdo for his “fundamentally Mexican” protégée (Zavala 69). In this light, when
Izquierdo rejected this aesthetic, Rivera had motive to respond on more than just personal offense: in his own mind—whether or not it was valid—Izquierdo threatened the idealized communist society.\(^87\)

Made skeptical by his experience with Izquierdo—and already predisposed to the patriarchal norms of his culture—Rivera therefore shows distrust and attempted control over his wife as an equal artist comrade. Although he supported her painting, and gave her requested instruction, he shot down her ambitions for mural painting—in this way deliberately keeping Kahlo (and the female artist, in general) outside of the “highest, most logical, the purest and strongest form of painting” (Orozco xlvii): the manifesto mural.\(^88\)\(^89\)

Continuing to occupy the self-appointed position of social educator, Rivera also seems to ‘correct’ certain works of Kahlo with which he disagrees. In 1932, while living in Detroit while Rivera elaborated the Ford Industry murals, Kahlo painted *Self-Portrait on the Border Between Mexico and the United States*. Rebecca Block and Lynda Hoffmun-Jeep analyze the painting as both feminist in implications, and cynical towards the industrial U.S. context:

> In situating herself, the female artist, on the border between Mexico and the United States, she takes up a position not previously occupied by a woman. A postcolonial subject, she has abandoned her culturally assigned and internationally dictated "place." The motley nature of her adornment at this particular time and space represents an individual and, allegorically, a nation in transition. The force of the painting lies not only

\(^87\) Rachel Tibol quotes Izquierdo as writing that she felt viewed as an “obstacle” and “inferior competitor whom they [male artists] must attack venomously” (“Maria Izquierdo,” *Latin American Art*, Spring 1989, pp. 23-24).

\(^88\) Deffebach summarizes: “Kahlo told a journalist: ‘Diego is the only one who has taught me about painting without ever placing ideas into my head or telling me what I should or should not do.’ This statement, while largely true, excludes Rivera’s lack of support for her early fascination with fresco. Except for discouraging her from pursuing fresco, he encouraged Kahlo as an artist throughout her life, and was responsible for the creation of the Museo Frida Kahlo after her death.” (28)

\(^89\) This pattern supports María Izquierdo’s insight that the male artist felt a certain entitled possession of what he viewed as the most influential artistic production (see footnote 9).
in the juxtaposition of industrial sterility and pre-Columbian fertility, as critics insist, but rather in the political impact of the location and "look" of the female artist.… It seems evident that Kahlo's sojourn in the United States caused critical self-reflection and helped crystallize her [indigenous] self-image. (11)

For Rivera, creating an icon of the male, industriously revolutionary worker (especially in this very moment of painting the *Detroit Industry* murals), this message was not satisfactory. Looking at Rivera’s *Man at the Crossroads*—named similarly to Kahlo’s *Self-Portrait on the Border*, and first drafted less than a year after this work’s creation—we may draw a number of similarities, and yet several striking differences, to Kahlo’s own Detroit-painted self portrait: both feature a central figure between two diverging sides; both show plants organically rooted at the bottom, with machinery filling the space above; both work through an axial representation of two worlds clashing.

Clearly marked differences in the paintings, however, show Rivera’s correctional attitude toward Kahlo’s work. First, Kahlo clearly assigns all organic life to Mexico, and negatively connotes machinery with only the U.S., while Rivera features both organics and machinery spanning both worlds equally. While Kahlo purposefully makes a critique on the technological materialism of the U.S. context in which she was living, Rivera then alters this view by positing one that he, quite simply, prefers: the combination of indigenismo inspiration (represented through nature) and technological labor (represented through machine). Then, when Kahlo “deliberately” positions herself as the "critical subject" in this crossing—so “able to speak from several places at once”—Rivera strips the advantage from the female, and in his mural awards decisive influence to the *Man at the Crossroads* (Block 11).

As much as Rivera views Kahlo as his student, he simultaneously recognizes her strength as an individual. He paints her as his mother figure in *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la*
Alameda Central (1947), where she symbolically dominates the guiding role of their relationship. Then, in Distribution of Arms (1928), she appears again as the nurturer of revolution—passing out the very tools by which the proletariat will unify for change. While both these positions still occupy the allowed norm of women’s “motherhood,” Rivera here admits, in his own way, that Kahlo holds strong power over him. Perhaps for this very reason, his control remains tight—for the fear of its loss is incentive to reify the structure of a patriarchal system, and maintain that the man’s artistic and intellectual production is “the only path” (Deffebach 19).

Rivera held problematic, patriarchal, and discriminatory biases—this much is clear. However, his intentions are political; and, if not completely redeeming, seem to stem from a pride in his own self-appointed job to guard and disseminate the real “Mexican.” His patriarchy responds in fear that women will not produce what he has devoted himself to teach (the unified, proletariat identity of revolution), and his investment in social equality here becomes the very motivation for his social exclusion.

Conclusion

María Luisa Marín is little known and little studied—and for this very reason an appropriate female intellectual with which to close this appendix argument. Although not an artist in the sense of Izquierdo and Kahlo, she nonetheless pioneered as an activist intellectual. Before even the Tres Grandes began their first commissions in 1924, she—in 1922—“emerged as a propulsive force for the protest,” and motivated the formation of a “powerful anarchist” organization: La Federación de Mujeres Libertarias (The Federation of Liberation Women) (Wood 5).

90 Since one of my major goals with this appendix is to highlight the under-recognized social influence that women in Mexico had at this time.
While in jail for her rebellious leadership in 1923, Marín wrote two articles for the communist publication *El Frente Único*, which together provide the most compelling argument for the participatory agency of the *soldaderas intelectuales*. The first expresses her undying fidelity to the “ideal of communism” and, without gender specification, praises the equal utopia of a communist society (Wood 22). The second, then, does present a feminist critique; but it does so through a strangely familiar performance of a summoned—yet still fictitious—reality:

Logic, not foreign to rational beings, induces us to deduce and analyze that the woman is the true owner of the world...Always willing in the paroxysm of our love to offer our lives, what wouldn’t we do to maintain the sacred flame of our emancipation? (Mitchell 157)

Marín here writes a feminist manifesto with audacious assumptions. When she writes, “logic induces us,” not only does she include women as “rational beings” in the “us” that can “deduce,” she further makes the assumption that any rational man would obviously include himself within this logical “us.” That is to say, man does not own logic to exclude women, but, regardless of gender, logic itself forces all “rational beings” to agree with a feminist agenda. It performs the fact of women’s equality, despite the stark contrast of their treatment in society. Appropriating the very tool of reason that traditionally was stripped from female accreditation, it equally compels both genders to act on feminine social participation.

The manifesto text balances unfair treatment of the woman in society; but it does not aim to combat “men” as a strict oppositional binary to “women.” Rather, with a universal, revolutionary vision equal to that of all three Grandes, Marín’s voice emphatically summons for the realization of an equal communist reality (as she wrote to exclusively idealize in her other *El Frente Único* article). She writes to all “Compañeros,” and follows immediately with the commands: “¡Viva el amor Universal! ¡Viva la emancipación de la mujer! ¡Arriba el
Comunismo! ¡Viva la humanidad libre!"91 92 Women’s emancipation is grouped into these convictions; it is not a separated goal, but rather, a condition of the others’ realizations. It is only for this reason—for the manifestation of “el amor Universal” and “la humanidad libre”—that Marín then finished with a direct address: “¿Mujeres? ¡A la lucha!”93 Seeing how the feminine figure was necessary to the completion of Communism’s true fruition, she calls women to fight—not against men, but alongside them.

With this inclusive vision towards a higher goal, Marín accomplishes the “revolutionary” manifestation that we see Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera attempt. However, without the perspective of gender equality—truly a “revolutionary” movement of its time—the Grandes could never fully accomplish their rebellious novelty (and for this reason, I have found it necessary to include this appendix). If the manifesto can be seen as a projection and insertion—domination, even—of formative social action, then it is not far off to compare the genre to a sign of virility. In this sense, with Marín’s bold appropriation of the form for the advancement of a truly unifying agenda, she supersedes the binary roles of social expectations—not only occupying the virile position of intellectual ‘insertion,’ but then using this very mode to move beyond gender-driven confrontation. Instead, she raises the real cooperation of a universally equal and inclusive, communist society.

I have demonstrated throughout this thesis that the Tres Grandes contributed the iconography of revolution—renovating the chaotic social space post-revolution, and disseminating it into the foundational self-identity of what is claimed as “Mexican.” But, as

91 “[Male or male/female] partners.” The Spanish noun ending in “o” in this case indicates that the group Marín addresses is either all male, or (more likely, given the context) a mixed group of both men and women activists.
92 “Long live universal love! Long live the emancipation of women! Let Communism rise up! Long live free humanity!”
93 “Women? To the fight!”
Marín implicitly warns against, their failure to recognize the participation of their women comrades inhibits even the possibility to realize the reality they dreamed: the reality of communist equality, which promotes a truly unified, ideal society.
Appendix B
Intentionally “Unfinished:” Another Method of Permeating Performance

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has presented an exhibit from March 18-September 4, 2016, entitled, “Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible.” The exhibit “examines […] the question of when a work of art is finished,” and “includes works left incomplete by their makers, a result that often provides insight into the artists’ creative process, as well as works that engage a non finito—intentionally unfinished—aesthetic that embraces the unresolved and open-ended” (“Unfinskihed”). Below, I present a case for considering all Tres Grandes as artists who create within this “non finite” strategy—employing it to achieve spiritually transcendent permanency in their art. Though it is outside the scope of this thesis’s main argument to completely investigate this area, this appendix presents evidence of provocative incompletion in their art, and (following the “unfinished” by leaving itself incomplete) aims to invoke further exploration of this promising finding.

The “Unfinished” Work of Orozco

“Unfinished” art is that which is still alive. If “unresolved and open-ended,” then it remains anticipating the possibility of change: it refuses to be buried. In this sense, incompletion is another mode that allows the intangible permanency José Clemente Orozco appropriates through El Greco’s mannerist and anti-naturalist aesthetic styles (see chapter three of this thesis). In fact, in the use of this very method, the two artists again show correlation: with an
“unfinished” precedent found in El Greco, José Clemente Orozco invokes spiritual transcendence in his incomplete *El Apocalipsis* (1942–44).⁹⁴

Orozco had been commissioned in 1941, to adorn the interior of Mexico City’s Iglesia de Jesús Nazareno.⁹⁵ However, closely watched by the new government of Manuel Ávila Camacho, Orozco was warned not to paint with the “la rudeza de un expresionismo de temática pública y radical” (Tibol).⁹⁶ The commissioned space—a historic temple and hospital in the capital city’s center—was the consecrated location for the remains of Hernán Cortés. In honor of the location, and in support of the imperialism it represented, Orozco was asked to paint “la glorificación y justificación de la conquista española de México” (Tibol).⁹⁷ Side-stepping the request, and denying his patrons direct access to his planning sketches, Orozco jumped into a controversial realization of this theme, which centered on his interpretation of St. John’s apocalyptic vision. Rather than an exalting veneration of the historical colonization, the resulting “enigmática pintura” deploys the grotesque imagery—exactly against which it was warned—while at once harshly critiquing the thematic sanctity of its surrounding space.⁹⁸ A potent compilation of

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⁹⁴ El Greco created *Christ Healing the Blind* in about the year 1570. It is an involved and personal work, featuring a most spiritually significant visualization of one of Jesus’s great miracles, and even features what scholars believe to be a representation of El Greco himself (Krén). However, he controversially and mysteriously left the work unfinished—leaving scholars questioning the work’s continuation (possibly in three different forms), and eventual completion by El Greco’s own son (“Art”) (Vechnyak).

⁹⁵ Although even the decision on this location was controversial, and intertwined with censorships of the establishing, newly-elected presidency (Tibol).

⁹⁶ “the harshness of public, radically-themed expressionism”

⁹⁷ “the glorification and justification of the Spanish colonialization of Mexico”

⁹⁸ “enigmatic painting”
“sarcasm, anguish, irritation; the angelic and the demonic, war and the Whore of Babylon”

historian Raquel Tibol describes the mural:

Una deidad aparece rodeada por seres humanos alados. Uno de estos ángeles ata al Demonio, otro desata a Satán que simboliza el dolor humano. Una filosa espada asoma por la boca de la deidad. Al ser amarrado el Diablo retuerce su cuerpo monstruoso. Su cabeza cae al suelo, mientras las patas con sus garras se levantan, dejando ver un sexo en forma de cabeza quizás humana. Satán es representado en forma multidimensional en actitudes que van del espanto al horror. En el muro del fondo unas telas conforman una figura de mujer, en cuyo regazo se acurrucan dos cuerpos tan inmateriales como el primero. Los cuerpos no existen, hay que imaginarlos (Tibol).

The audience would have to always imagine those bodies, for after two years of working, Orozco left the mural unfinished. Sources are unclear as to the reason for this abandonment, with the most Tibol’s specific documentation mentioning only ambiguous “otros compromisos.”

What Raquel Tibol makes clear, however, is the condescending—even scandalized—response of those previously supportive of Orozco’s work (Mexican historians Rafael García Granados and Justino Fernandez, for example). Despite the patrons’ large investment, no attempt was made to have the artist finish his work, and in fact, it was left for decades without protection—(hoped?) to fade into less insulting imagery, less controversial antagonism.

99 “sarcasm, anguish, irritation; the angelic and the demonic, war and the Whore of Babylon”

100 “A (female) deity appears surrounded by winged human figures. One of these angels ties the Beast, another unties Satan symbolizing human pain [see the biblical book of Revelation]. A sharp sword raises out of the deity’s mouth. Tied up, the Demon contorts his body terribly. His head falls towards the ground, while his clawed hooves rise upward, leaving visible his sex organ in the form of a head, perhaps human. Satan is presented in a multidimensional form, in positions that go from fright to horror. On the back wall, fabric shapes the figure of a woman, in whose lap cower two bodies as immaterial as the first. The bodies do not exist; they must be imagined.”

101 “other commitments”
The “Unfinished” Work of Siqueiros

As chapter two of this thesis emphasizes, Siqueiros left his first mural incomplete, as a rebellious statement of authorial abandonment, which then performs the very content of its sacrificial depiction. Sergei Eisenstein responded by glorifying the mural on an international cinematic stage—recreating its image in his own film—and furthering its life even beyond the destroyed walls of the Colegio San Ildefonso (see chapter two). However, *El Entierro de un obrero sacrificado* is not Siqueiros’s only incomplete mural. In 1932, the painter spent seven months on commission in Los Angeles, working with students from the Chouinard School of Art to construct three murals—two of which were never allowed to reach or remain complete: *Mitin Obrero* and *América Tropical: Oprimida y Destrozada por los Imperialismos.* Their placement was to be on LA’s Olvera Street, which, according to writer Ruben Martinez, was a staged tourist replication of an idealized cultural, “Mexican” neighborhood: "quaint, folkloric, cutesy, touristy and assiduously avoiding anything controversial or political" (Barco). However, Siqueiros remained faithful to communism and indigenous rights; to the dismay of the US commissioners, his murals used intense graphic images of violence and oppression (Barco).

*Mitin Obrero* was the first to be painted. It is a two-story production, depicting a group of multi-racially distinguishable workers, all listening to an angry and motivating speaker—markedly identified with a red (communist) shirt (Figure 11). When the mural was revealed in July, 1932—with over 800 in attendance—it was received with dividing controversy: support from the Left, and criticizing fear from the anti-communist majority. Almost immediately, it was recovered; just months later, it was permanently destroyed (Douglas).

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102 The third, *Portrait of Mexico Today*, was painted for a private studio, and therefore untouchable to the “Red Squad” (section of the LAPD designed specifically to seet out and eradicate communism in the US) (Rainer 9).
From the experience, Siqueiros learned his environment, and how to strategize his interaction with it. In October, 1932, just three months after Mitin Obrero had been scandalously revealed, the painter worked by night, adding—in secret—the “finishing touches” to his second, more important LA mural, América Tropical (Figure 12). The next morning, the radical rooftop artwork would be revealed: the right and left extremes portrayed landscapes of Mexican jungles and architecture of Mayan ruins; but the most highlighted figure in the mural, in fact, was the artist’s final covert addition: in the foregrounded center, a Mexican indigenous man hangs beaten and sacrificed on a crossbeam. Above him, a bald eagle swoops its snatching claws—as the preying predator of United States imperialism. Even more controversially received than Mitin Obrero, the mural’s previously emphatic press coverage was at once hushed, and even the LAPD’s anti-communist “Red Squad” called in to investigate the event. Almost faster than it had been revealed, the mural was covered, and—like its Mitin Obrero counterpart—destroyed (Morrison).

The “Unfinished” Work of Rivera

In his 2012 article reflecting upon Siqueiros’s LA work, LA Times writer Patt Morrison cannot help but to mention, also, “A Diego Rivera mural in Rockefeller Center” (Morrison). Man at the Crossroads (1934) (described in Chapter four of this thesis), like Siqueiros’s LA scandals, was “chipped out of the wall because Lenin was depicted as a leader of workers” (Morrison). According to the mural’s antagonists, the Lenin’s controversial glorification was not always present in the planned mural sketches. Rockefeller-controlled newspapers printed that the artist “tried to pull a fast one and slip over the head of Lenin, which was not in the original sketch,” and a John Reed Club spokesman wrote, “Rivera put one over on us” (Rivera 7). Although the
sketch of Lenin did appear in both the original design and openly sketch on the wall, the Rockefeller's claim a “fast one” on the basis of Rivera’s increased emphasis on Lenin as the mural unfolded. At first, the communist leader appeared less recognizable—covered in a hat, and lacking his quintessential mustache and beard (Figure 13). However, by the time mural activity was shut down, Lenin appeared out of his military uniform, uncovered from the disguising hat, and with the overtly recognizable countenance with which he is universally, iconically depicted (Figure 14).

Conclusion

The “unfinished” quality of the mural, for all Tres Grandes, is specifically strategized as an antagonist interaction with its surrounding social space; that is, it is “unfinished” precisely because it is never allowed standing completion. The artists themselves invite the “unfinished” quality, by purposefully implanting content that demands active response. Embedded with the mechanism to elicit negative audience condemnation, each of these strategic murals is designed like a time bomb, loaded with the incentive of its own self-destruction. But, of course, the very scandal is a performance and realization of each murals’ own content: provoking angry groups of protesting communists, providing itself as the Mexican “body” martyred at the hand of US capitalism, unifying a iconographic symbol in the space of Revolutionary action. Morrison reflects that “over time, it was the art, not the politics that was forgotten;” for socio-politically motivated artists, hoping to reconstruct the ideological unification and innate identity of their nation, I propose that this was intentional. Once destroyed, the mural is “unfinished;” in a state of incompletion, its physicality fades. What is left behind, then, is its essence—its identity. The
very act of destruction enables its true didactic dissemination—the manifesto performance, permeating the ideological life of Revolution.
Figure 11: Mitin Obrero (1932)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Figure 12 (detail view): América Tropical: Oprímida y Destrozada por los Imperialismos (1932)

http://library.artstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true
Figure 13: Lenin Sketch in *Man at the Crossroads* (1934)

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