

Mexican Murals and Fascist Frescoes:
Cultural Reinvention in 20th-Century Mexico and Italy

An honors thesis for the Department of International Literary and Visual Studies

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Introduction

The Mexican Revolution, begun in 1910 in opposition to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, evolved into a violent social revolution that lasted throughout the following decade, taking the lives of close to a million Mexican people.¹ Beginning almost immediately in 1920 and in the decades that followed, politicians, intellectuals, and artists joined forces not only to recover from the economic and social devastation of the war, but also to redefine Mexico's national identity. Through the establishment of new schools, libraries, and museums, the support for popular festivals and traditions, and the patronage of large-scale public art, they attempted to unite members of diverse social classes under a uniquely Mexican culture. While many intellectuals and artists drew on Mexico's indigenous cultures and history for inspiration, the use of the term *renacimiento* (renaissance) to refer to these self-conscious attempts to facilitate a cultural rebirth suggests a reliance on the Italian Renaissance as a historical model. Unlike the Italian Renaissance, however, the cultural rebirth of the Mexican *renacimiento* was closely tied to a political rebirth.

In October of 1922 Benito Mussolini and his Fascist followers marched through the streets of Rome, ceremonially seizing power from Giovanni Giolitti's liberal government.² The March on Rome symbolically marked the beginning of the National Fascist Party's rule over Italy, which would last until the end of World War II. Although the Fascist government promised social reform and political power for the people, by 1926 Mussolini had established a totalitarian state. Through a multi-faceted propaganda campaign, the regime attempted to strengthen Italy's

¹ Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, "Introduction," in *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 4.

² Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 1-3.

international image, and unify Italians across regional boundaries. In addition to the manipulation of radio, newspapers, photography, and public art, the appropriation of Italy's classical, medieval, and Renaissance history served as a means for building up Mussolini's reputation as a charismatic and virile leader, and spreading the image of Italy as a strong and united nation.

Through visual and textual analysis, my thesis studies the role of muralism as a medium through which Mexican and Italian artists contributed to the reinvention of cultural identity in these periods of political uncertainty and change. Specifically, I examine the ways in which early-twentieth-century Mexican and Italian muralists looked to Italian Renaissance techniques and styles for inspiration, in an attempt to redefine their countries' history, international image, and national identity. In the Mexican context my research focuses on Diego Rivera's murals at the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) and the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo. In Italy, on the other hand, I examine Achille Funi's fresco cycle in the Palazzo Comunale of Ferrara.

As an International Literary and Visual Studies major, my research has taken a cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary approach. Much research has been conducted on Rivera's Mexican murals and Funi's Italian frescoes but, despite the similarities between the Mexican and Italian mural movements, artists from these two contexts are rarely compared. Studying early-twentieth-century Mexican and Italian muralism in parallel has allowed me to compare not only the techniques, styles, and themes of Rivera's and Funi's murals, but also the political and social contexts out of which these two artists emerged.

Rivera's and Funi's interest in cultural reinvention can profitably be understood in light of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's concept of invented traditions. In *The Invention of*

Tradition, they explore the role of “traditions” that “appear or claim to be old [but] are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” in shaping national identity, specifically in times of rapid social transformation.³ Although new customs arise from changing political and social situations, invented traditions also attempt to establish continuity with a particular element of a society’s past history. In *National Identity*, Anthony Smith describes nationalism itself as a form of invented culture in which artists have the power to shape the nation’s image and identity. According to Smith, the role of artists and intellectuals is to “directly or evocatively, ‘reconstruct’ the sights, sounds and images of the nation” and “through their musings and research, [give] voice to wider aspirations that they have conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols.”⁴ By appropriating traditional images and styles in the service of creating a stronger national and cultural identity, Rivera and Funi assisted in this “reconstruction” or “invention” of their respective countries.

While many scholars, including Mary K. Coffey, have examined the influence of Rivera’s cubist experience on his Mexican murals, Rivera himself suggested that the themes and styles of his murals were based in the traditions of popular Mexican art. By analyzing the sketches of Renaissance art that Rivera created during his 1920 trip to Italy, I hope to reveal yet another source of inspiration for Rivera’s Mexican murals. Rivera’s sketches from Italy are mentioned in passing in many of his biographies but they have rarely been analyzed, and until very recently had only been published as low-quality black and white scanned reproductions. In his 1953 article, “Diego Rivera in Italy,” Jean Charlot provides a brief analysis of a collection of these sketches, which had come under his possession after Rivera returned to Mexico.⁵ Charlot

³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

⁴ Anthony D Smith, *National Identity* (University of Nevada Press, 1991), 71, 93.

⁵ Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

includes images of six sketches, and attempts to decipher and analyze the notes surrounding the sketches. More recently, Clara Bargellini has worked to create a complete inventory of the Italian sketches, as well as to reconstruct the details of Rivera's time in Italy.⁶ Although her analysis focuses primarily on Rivera's sketches of human figures, she also describes his sketches after Italian Renaissance, Medieval, and Byzantine works of art.

I hope to build on Charlot's and Bargellini's analyses of these sketches by drawing connections between examples of Rivera's sketches after Renaissance Italian works and the murals he created upon his return to Mexico. In January of 2013 thirty drawings from the sketchbook that had ended up in Charlot's possession were displayed at Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art in New York City. I had the privilege of viewing and handling these sketches, as well as working from the high-quality scans included in the gallery's catalog.

After beginning to examine Rivera's use of Italian Renaissance sources for the purpose of shaping Mexico's cultural identity, I became interested in exploring the influence of Renaissance art on Italian muralists from the same time period, to whom this source would have been even more geographically and culturally relevant than it was to Rivera. The Italian Fascist government is well-known for its revival of Roman antiquity in art, architecture, and other cultural realms. Much research has been conducted on Mussolini's use of Italy's Roman history to reinforce his imperialist actions; on the other hand, the Fascist revival of medieval and Renaissance styles and traditions is far less documented, perhaps because it occurred largely outside of Rome.

In *The Renaissance Perfected*, Medina Lasansky discusses the ways in which Italy's fascist government drew upon medieval and Renaissance architectural styles and cultural

⁶ Clara Bargellini, "Diego Rivera en Italia," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* XVII (1995): 85-136, and Bargellini, "La recreación del arte italiano en la obra de Diego Rivera," in *Tiempo y Arte: XIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, 370-387 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1991).

traditions to gain political support and to strengthen Italy's international image.⁷ She cites the town of Arezzo as an example of the manipulated restoration of medieval and Renaissance structures that took place in Tuscany under the fascist regime, and examines the reinvention of medieval and Renaissance festivals such as Siena's *palio* and Florence's *calcio*. Diane Yvonne Ghirardo provides a similar analysis of the Fascist reinvention of medieval and Renaissance architecture and festivals, taking the northern Italian city of Ferrara as her focus.⁸

I hope to extend Lasansky's and Ghirardo's analyses of the Fascist revival of medieval and Renaissance architecture and festivals to include a similar historical revival in mural painting. Of the many murals created under the Fascist government, those painted by Achille Funi serve as a prime example of the adaptation of Renaissance styles and themes to a modern cultural and political context. In particular, his fresco cycle for the Palazzo Comunale in Ferrara demonstrates the influence of Renaissance art on his visual reinvention of Ferrara's history and culture.

Chapter 1 discusses the influence of the Italian Renaissance art that Rivera viewed and sketched in Italy on the murals that he later created at the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico City and the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo. Visual comparisons between Rivera's sketches and murals highlight the effects of his trip to Italy on his development as an artist. The compositional structures of many of Rivera's murals are deeply informed by the Renaissance works he viewed in Italy; additionally, the frescoes and large oil paintings that Rivera sketched seem to have inspired his interest in creating persuasive and didactic monumental art, capable of effectively relating to viewers. By analyzing Rivera's murals as

⁷ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*.

⁸ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte in Ferrara," in *Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, 97-112 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), and Ghirardo, "Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism (Apr., 1996): 347-372.

examples of state-sponsored commissions, I attempt to situate his art in the context of the larger nationalistic attempt to create a stronger Mexican cultural identity.

In Chapter 2 my focus shifts to Fascist-era Italy, where I highlight the Fascist government's use of Italian history as a means for establishing a unifying national identity. I examine Funi's revival of Renaissance styles and themes in his frescoes in the Palazzo Comunale in Ferrara as an example of the reinvention of history and tradition under Fascism. By comparing panels from Funi's cycle to images from the Renaissance decorations of the Palazzo Schifanoia, I determine that while Funi was clearly looking to Italian Renaissance art for inspiration, his frescoes also contain references to the Fascist context in which they were created.

Finally, Chapter 3 studies textual sources as a means of comparison between Rivera's and Funi's murals, and the larger artistic movements in which they worked. An analysis of the manifestos that each artist signed highlights the intentions behind their choice of muralism as a medium for artistic expression, including their appreciation of the didactic, persuasive, and collective potential of muralism. An examination of additional texts written by Rivera and Funi provides a window into their individual artistic ideals, in particular their desire to contribute to the recreation of cultural identity by combining traditional and historical sources with elements of contemporary culture

Chapter 1: Diego Rivera's Sketches from Italy:

The Influence of Italian Renaissance Art on the Murals at the Ministry of Public Education and Chapingo Chapel

In 1920, as Mexico was beginning to emerge from the chaos and violence of its Revolution, Diego Rivera was completing the final stage of his 14-year stay in Europe: a trip to Italy. The sketches of Italian art that he created on this trip give us a window into the types of art that interested him most, and allow us to understand how he interpreted and synthesized the works that he saw. The influence of the Italian Renaissance art that Rivera viewed and sketched is apparent in the murals he created upon his return to Mexico, particularly those in the chapel of the Agricultural College at Chapingo, and at the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico City. Rivera surely viewed and drew inspiration from a much wider range of Italian Renaissance works than the few paintings featured in the sketches that remain from his travels. I do not deny the influence of artists such as Giotto, Michelangelo, and Paolo Uccello on Rivera's murals, but in this chapter I will attempt to offer a new perspective by focusing primarily on Rivera's sketches as evidence for his interest in Italian Renaissance art. Under the patronage of José Vasconcelos, Mexico's Secretary of Public Education during the first half of the 1920s, Rivera drew inspiration from the monumental, engaging, and persuasive works that he had seen in Italy in order to present a creative reinterpretation of Mexican history, culture, and identity.

Rivera's Artistic Development: The Academy and Europe

Rivera's study of Italian art did not begin with his 1920 trip to Italy; as a student at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, his training included copying classical and Renaissance sculptures, many of which were Italian in origin. Rivera began taking classes at the Academy in

1897, at age 11, and continued until 1906, right before he left Mexico for Europe.¹ Since the early years of the Academy, students had been trained to copy ancient sculptures in order to study classical ideals of beauty.² Although Rivera's training still focused on drawing through careful observation of prints and plaster casts, these were no longer used as strict models of artistic perfection. Instead, Rivera was able to develop his precise drawing and painting skills by creating less traditional studies such as *Venus de Milo* (1903), in which he depicted a plaster cast looking as if it had toppled over.³ The unconventional position of the sculpture as depicted here suggests both an admiration and a challenge to tradition, a duality that would characterize his later murals. Among Rivera's most influential teachers at the Academy was the artist Santiago Rebull, who had spent time studying in Italy, as well as the landscape painter José María Velasco. While Rebull emphasized the importance of drawing as a basis for painting, Velasco influenced Rivera's understanding of perspective and compositional structure.⁴ Both of these skills would play important roles in Rivera's study of Italian art, as well as in his mural creations later in life.

Rivera's 1902 academic study of an Italian Renaissance bas-relief of Saint Peter (Figure 1) highlights his training in detailed copying of European art. This study demonstrates Rivera's ability to accurately represent a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional canvas, even at the young age of 15. His delicate use of shading and highlights makes the painting appear as

¹ Juan Coronel Rivera, "Diego Rivera: His Years of Growth and Learning," in *Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Landucci Editores, 1999), 32, 46.

² Clara Bargellini and Elizabeth Fuentes, *Guía que permite captar lo bello: Yesos y dibujos de la Academia de San Carlos, 1778-1916*. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1989), 20.

³ Bargellini and Fuentes, *Guía que permite captar lo bello*, 50.

⁴ Luis-Martín Lozano, "Diego Rivera, Classicus Sum," in *Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution*, (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Landucci Editores, 1999), 130.

realistic as a photograph.⁵ Although Rivera would later depart from this sort of realistic painting, his ability to create precise drawings and paintings through observation is evident throughout all of his later work.

With the help of a grant from Teodoro Dehesa, the governor of Veracruz, Rivera began his trip to Europe in January of 1907.⁶ While the events of the Mexican Revolution unfolded in his home country, Rivera studied the work of European masters from the past, such as El Greco, Goya, and Velazquez. He was also inspired by the work of modern European artists, including Modigliani, Picasso, and Mondrian. Throughout the following decade, he spent time in Spain, Belgium, England, and most of all, in Paris, with a brief return to Mexico in 1911. Between 1913 and 1917, Rivera departed from his academic training and developed an individual cubist style, similar to that of his European friends but infused with Mexican symbolism.⁷ By 1918, he had begun to abandon cubism, returning instead to a more representational painting style influenced by the work of Cézanne and Renoir.⁸ Rivera later explained that cubism was “too technical, fixed, and restricted for what [he] wanted to say,”⁹ but there may also have been political motivations for his departure from the style.¹⁰ Regardless of the reasons, by the time he began his trip to Italy Rivera no longer identified as a cubist.

Italian Travels and Sketches

Rivera’s trip to Italy was motivated by both personal and external factors. Not only was he “realizing that tour of Italy for which [he] longed so,” but he was also following the wishes of

⁵ Florence Arquin, *Diego Rivera: The Shaping of an Artist, 1889-1921* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 11.

⁶ Ramón Favela, “Diego Rivera’s Entry into Cubism: The Problem of El Greco and Cézanne,” in *Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution*, (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Landucci Editores, 1999), 65.

⁷ William H. Robinson, “Cubist Heresies: Diego Rivera and the Parisian Avant-Garde, 1913-1917,” in *Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Landucci Editores, 1999), 105.

⁸ Lozano, “Classicus Sum,” 136.

⁹ Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography with Gladys March* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 68.

¹⁰ Robinson, “Cubist Heresies,” 124.

José Vasconcelos, the president of the National University of Mexico at the time, who would later become the Secretary of Public Education.¹¹ Officially, Vasconcelos requested that Rivera be paid for “a mission aimed at relating [the Mexican] National School of Fine Arts with similar Institutions in [Italy], and with its best artists,” but he also hoped Rivera would return to Mexico with new material and inspiration for future artistic projects.¹² Thanks to the multiple goals of his trip, Rivera spent his time in Italy both learning about Italian art history, and collecting ideas for his own future creations.

Rivera’s tendency towards exaggeration and storytelling has obscured many of the true details of his trip to Italy. At one point he claimed to have spent a year and a half in Italy, from January of 1920 to July of 1921,¹³ but on a separate occasion he said he had traveled to Italy in November of 1920.¹⁴ Both Clara Bargellini and Patrick Marnham suggest that Rivera’s trip was actually shorter than either of these accounts, probably only lasting from December of 1920 to March of 1921.¹⁵ As far as his itinerary within Italy, Rivera later wrote that he traveled “from Milan southward to Florence, Rome, Naples, and Pompeii, and then northward, along the Adriatic coast, through Venice.”¹⁶ According to Marnham and Pete Hamill, Rivera followed an itinerary planned by Elie Faure, the French art historian who had taught Rivera about fresco art while he was in Paris.¹⁷ We know from Rivera’s sketches and letters that he spent time in many

¹¹ Quoted in Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 128.

¹² Quoted in Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 127.

¹³ Rivera, *My Art, My Life*, 71.

¹⁴ Quoted in Clara Bargellini, “La recreación del arte italiano en la obra de Diego Rivera,” in *Tiempo y Arte: XIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1991), 382.

¹⁵ Clara Bargellini, “Diego Rivera en Italia,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* XVII (1995): 96, <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/src/inicio/ArtPdfRed.jsp?iCve=36906603#>, and Patrick Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open: A Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 148.

¹⁶ Rivera, *My Art, My Life*, 71.

¹⁷ Pete Hamill, *Diego Rivera* (Harry N Abrams Inc, 1999), 75, and Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open*, 148.

of the cultural centers of the Italian Renaissance, including the smaller cities of Siena, Verona, and Padua.

Although Rivera claimed to have completed more than three hundred sketches during his time in Italy, this number may have been another exaggeration on his part.¹⁸ We cannot know for certain, because many of these drawings have been lost, or are now kept in private collections in Europe, Mexico, and the United States.¹⁹ As of 1995, Bargellini had identified about 150 of Rivera's drawings from Italy, and located around half of those. Most of Rivera's Italian sketches are small drawings done with pencil on poor quality paper.²⁰ The size, medium, and unfinished quality of the drawings demonstrate that Rivera created them as private sketches that would allow him to understand the art he was viewing, and to refer to it later on. (During the 1930s, however, he was able to sell many of his Italian drawings in both the United States and Mexico.²¹) While Rivera may have exaggerated the number of drawings he created while in Italy, his Italian sketches depict a wide range of subjects, from rural landscapes to portraits of women and children.

More than half of the sketches that Bargellini has identified depict works of art that Rivera saw while in Italy, including religious paintings, Etruscan and Byzantine sculptures and mosaics, and architectural structures. Rivera created these drawings using thin outlines and quickly-sketched shaded areas, with a particular focus on the geometric composition of the works he was copying, rather than iconographic details. In many of his drawings from Verona and Venice, he included notes written in French about the original works' sizes and mediums, as well as the artists' uses of colors and light.

¹⁸ Bargellini, "La recreación del arte italiano," 382.

¹⁹ Ellen Sharp, "Rivera as a Draftsman," in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, ed. Cynthia Newman Helms (New York: Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1986), 207.

²⁰ Bargellini, "Diego Rivera en Italia," 100.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Based on Rivera's sketches of an unidentified church interior (Figure 8), a mural scaffold (Figure 2), and a Mantegna fresco (Figure 4), we can tell that he was already considering the advantages, as well as the challenges, of creating large-scale public artwork. In his sketch of the church interior, Rivera drew three small figures – two kneeling in prayer and one standing – below a large haloed figure set between two columns and under an arch. This sketch is very basic (Rivera does not include enough details to determine whether the large figure is part of a fresco, a mosaic, or a large easel painting), and unlike many of his other sketches of Italian art, this one does not contain any written notes. Despite the ambiguity about the setting and medium of this religious work of art, Rivera's inclusion of the three churchgoers suggests his curiosity about the relationship between viewers and monumental works of art.

Rivera's drawing of scaffolding, on the other hand, demonstrates a practical interest in the techniques of mural painting. This sketch contains a drawing of the entire scaffold structure, in addition to details of its construction and notes about his observations: "A scaffold for working on ceilings, very simple to move by sliding it over planks greased with lard, slipped under the front legs raised by means of wooden screw-levers."²² The technical details of this sketch and the accompanying notes suggest that Rivera was not simply admiring Italian Renaissance frescoes as a passive tourist would have done; on the contrary, he was actively engaging with the art he viewed, drawing inspiration and formulating strategies for his future creations.

Return to Mexico, First Mural Commissions under Vasconcelos

Rivera returned to Mexico in mid-1921, after another short stay in Paris.²³ Back in Mexico, he explained that it was not only "the homesickness that overtook [him]...in all of the

²² *Diego Rivera: The Italian Sketchbook, 1920-21* (New York: Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art, 2013) 34.

²³ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 130.

countries of [his] pilgrimage” that compelled him to return to Mexico, but also his desire to begin “certain projects that [would] doubtless give new and greater meaning to [his] work, if realized.”²⁴ Vasconcelos and Alberto Pani, the Mexican ambassador to France, encouraged Rivera to leave Europe, promising him work upon his return to Mexico.²⁵ As Secretary of Education under Obregón, Vasconcelos was eager to begin granting commissions for the creation of large-scale public art.

Vasconcelos was born in Oaxaca, but grew up on the border of Mexico and the United States, attending school in Eagle Pass, Texas.²⁶ After graduating from law school in 1905, he helped found the Ateneo de la Juventud, a group of young Mexican intellectuals who embraced humanistic studies as a reaction against the prevailing positivism of the intellectuals who supported President Porfirio Díaz’s administration.²⁷ Vasconcelos was forced into exile in the United States during the Revolution, but returned to Mexico after the war had ended and became president of the National University in 1920. While in this role, he began touring Mexico with intellectuals and artists, advocating for the creation of a federal education system. His dream became a reality in 1921, when Obregón created the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) and Vasconcelos became the first minister.

Even before the new MPE had been created, Vasconcelos began work on the building that would eventually house the offices of his federal education system. In constructing the new MPE, Vasconcelos chose to add on to several existing structures that had been abandoned during the Revolution. After thirteen months of construction, the new MPE was a three-story Spanish

²⁴ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 131.

²⁵ Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open*, 148.

²⁶ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 82.

²⁷ Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 139-40.

colonial style building with two large courtyards, each surrounded by open corridors.²⁸

Vasconcelos then hired a group of artists, including Rivera, Jean Charlot, and Amado de la Cueva, to decorate the corridors with frescoes, while Ignacio Asúnsolo and Manuel Centurión were commissioned to create sculptures for the façade and courtyard. Vasconcelos hoped the sculptural decorations would represent the mix of races at the core of Hispano-American culture.²⁹ Following this theme, Centurión created four relief panels for the corners of the first courtyard, each symbolizing one of the “four races of the world”: Quetzalcóatl represented Mexican culture, an image of the ship *Las Casas* represented Spanish culture, Plato represented Greek culture, and Buddha represented Indian culture.³⁰

Vasconcelos divided his new MPE into three departments: schools, libraries, and fine arts. In addition to building rural schools and translating and publishing classic texts, he coordinated the Department of Fine Arts, which supported artistic education in schools and other public settings. This department’s programs depended on the work of Mexican artists; some were paid to teach art in schools, while others received commissions for creating works of public art. Mexico did not have a developed art market until after World War II, so many artists relied on the government for economic support.³¹

According to Robin Adèle Greeley, Obregón’s administration supported muralism for three main reasons. First of all, the government hoped to use sophisticated public art to promote the image of Mexico as a modern and civilized nation, open for international investment. Secondly, muralism was seen as a way to symbolically incorporate the masses; by visually

²⁸ Helms, “Secretaría de Educación Pública,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 241.

²⁹ Luis E Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico* (University of Texas Press, 2010), 38.

³⁰ José Vasconcelos, “Escultura y pintura,” in *Discursos 1920-1950* (Mexico City: Editorial Botas, 1970), 86, ICAA Documents (821948).

³¹ Mari Carmen Ramirez-Garcia, “The Ideology and Politics of the Mexican Mural Movement, 1920-1925,” PhD diss. (University of Chicago, 1989), 111-112.

demonstrating to the peasantry that the government supported their needs, Obregón hoped to prevent future rebellions. Finally, in an attempt to form a more centralized government, and as will be discussed here in Chapter 3, muralism functioned as a means for uniting Mexican citizens across regional and class boundaries.³² Vasconcelos focused on this last priority as well; he viewed Mexico's geographic, social, and cultural division as the root of the nation's historical problems, and as a potential threat to its sovereignty.³³ In order for Mexico to demonstrate its political power, the nation first had to prove its cultural superiority; murals served as a way of visually representing *mexicanidad*, and as a means for developing a unifying Mexican identity. Vasconcelos also hoped to use public art to civilize the masses, much as the Spanish colonizers had used religious murals with the intention of civilizing and converting the indigenous people of Mexico.³⁴

Although Vasconcelos emphasized the social function of muralism, the artists who received commissions from him were free to determine the individual style and content of their work. Charlot describes the “unbounded freedom enjoyed by the commissioned artists,” explaining that “the Secretary could impose neither subject matter nor style.”³⁵ Due to this hands-off style of patronage, the beginning of the Mexican mural movement was characterized by great aesthetic diversity, experimentation, and some interesting missteps.³⁶

However, Vasconcelos' initial hesitation towards Rivera suggests that he did hold some stylistic biases. Although Vasconcelos had encouraged Rivera to return to Mexico and join his cultural campaign, he wrote in a letter that he was “prejudiced against [Rivera] because he was a

³² Robin Adèle Greeley, “Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920-1970,” in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, ed. Alejandro Anreus et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 18.

³³ José Joaquín Blanco, *Se Llamaba Vasconcelos: Una Evocación Crítica* (Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 1977), 97.

³⁴ Ramírez-García, “The Ideology and Politics of the Mexican Mural Movement,” 107.

³⁵ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 94.

³⁶ Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico 1920-1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), see chapter 3.

Cubist painter and that made him deplorable...for the task of murals the State wished to accomplish.”³⁷ This quote suggests that Vasconcelos may have maintained biases based on Rivera’s work from the previous decade; by the time Rivera returned to Mexico, three years had passed since he had begun to abandon cubism. Regardless of the degree to which Rivera self-identified as a cubist at this point, Vasconcelos was skeptical of his style. Before granting Rivera his first mural commission, Vasconcelos attempted to re-immense him in Mexican art by taking him on a trip to the Yucatan peninsula. On this trip Rivera was introduced to a style of painting very different from what he had seen in Italy: the 12th-century frescoes at Chichén Itzá.³⁸ While this trip may have increased Rivera’s interest in pre-Columbian styles and themes, and distanced him from cubism as Vasconcelos had hoped, it certainly did not erase the lessons he had learned while traveling in Europe. The influence of the Renaissance art that Rivera viewed and sketched in Italy is evident in the murals he created during the 1920s, beginning with his first mural commission, in the auditorium of the National Preparatory School (NPS), the elite secondary school where Vasconcelos was serving as temporary director.³⁹

Entitled *Creation* (1922, Figure 3), Rivera’s decoration of the NPS auditorium was painted in encaustic, and portrays two groups of figures on either side of an arch that rises above a recessed central niche. On the left side, Rivera depicts a group of figures that represent the emanations of the feminine spirit, stacked vertically above a depiction of Eve as a mestiza woman; the right side shows a symmetrical image of the emanations of the male spirit rising above a mestizo Adam.⁴⁰ At the top of the arch three pointing hands extend from a half-circle, painted dark blue with gold stars.

³⁷ Lozano, “Classicus Sum,” 152.

³⁸ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 133-4.

³⁹ Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 38.

⁴⁰ Helms, “Anfiteatro Bolívar,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 239.

In December of 1922, after Rivera had completed the decoration of this front arched wall, Vasconcelos provided the funding for him to travel to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Southern Mexico, in order to further immerse himself in Mexican culture.⁴¹ Upon his return to Mexico City, Rivera completed his mural in the NPS auditorium by painting the recessed niche. While the tropical vegetation that covers this niche may have been inspired by Rivera's trip to Tehuantepec, the central focus of the mural is a Christ-like figure that emerges from these plants. The animals below this figure may also appear to be fauna from the Mexican tropics, but they are in fact symbolic representations of the four evangelists.⁴² Despite Rivera's recent trip to Tehuantepec, the subject matter and style of *Creation* more clearly reflect the influence of his time in Europe; the Christian iconography and the overall composition of this mural call to mind the decoration of Italian Renaissance churches, in particular Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel.⁴³

In addition to the highly European style and content of Rivera's first Mexican mural, the medium of *Creation* further demonstrates its role as a transitional and experimental work of art. Although Rivera was clearly drawing inspiration from Italian Renaissance frescoes, he painted this first mural in encaustic, not in fresco. In a 1922 interview Rivera explained that he "decided on this technique [encaustic] because it outlasts fresco."⁴⁴ Charlot, who had experimented with fresco in his own mural in the stairway at the NPS, later helped Rivera master the fresco technique, but he recalls that "to change from encaustic to fresco proved a painful ordeal for Rivera."⁴⁵ Charlot's knowledge of fresco painting came originally from his studies of French and

⁴¹ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 143-44.

⁴² Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 40.

⁴³ We do not have evidence that Rivera created any sketches after Giotto's frescoes, but he almost certainly would have visited the Arena Chapel while in Padua.

⁴⁴ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

Italian treatises, but Rivera later described his technique as “a process that resuscitates the manner of painting in fresco of the ancient Mexicans,” and for a time allegedly even mixed cactus juice with his fresco materials.⁴⁶

Rivera’s transition to fresco occurred in his next mural commission: the decoration of the corridor halls of Vasconelos’ new MPE (1923-28). Whereas in *Creation* the lasting effects of Rivera’s Italian travels mask the evidence of his more recent trip to Tehuantepec, the influence of both of these sources is apparent at the MPE. Entitled *A Cosmography of Modern Mexico*, Rivera’s cycle at the MPE covers almost 17,000 square feet of wall surface, decorating the corridor walls of both of the building’s courtyards (Figure 6).⁴⁷ In depicting a “cosmography,” Rivera aspired to portray the general characteristics of the Mexican nation, through images of its history, geography, and people.⁴⁸ In over 100 panels, Rivera uses allegorical scenes to illustrate the work, festivals, and social struggles of the Mexican people. In the smaller courtyard, the Court of Labor, he promotes the ideal of education as a means of spiritual evolution, with depictions of physical labor on the ground floor, grisaille symbols of professional work on the second floor, and allegorical images of the fraternity of peasants and workers on the third floor.⁴⁹ In the Court of Fiestas, on the other hand, Rivera connects Mexican popular culture to his revolutionary socialist ideas, beginning with scenes of popular festivals on the ground floor, and culminating in colorful images of the proletarian and agrarian revolutions that he hoped were soon to come.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 259.

⁴⁷ Mary K. Coffey, “‘All Mexico on a Wall’: Diego Rivera’s Murals for the Ministry of Public Education,” in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, ed. Alejandro Anreus et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 57.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 60.

Since Rivera painted this cycle over the course of five years, the style and subject matter of his earliest panels, on the first floor of the Court of Labor, differs greatly from that of the last panels he completed, on the third floor of the Court of Fiestas. In her essay, “‘All Mexico on a Wall’: Diego Rivera’s Murals for the Ministry of Public Education,” Mary Coffey describes Rivera’s artistic and ideological development at the MPE as a progression from the “Italiannate-neoprimitivist” style of the Giotto-inspired panels in the Court of Labor, to the “engaged social realist” style of the densely-packed and more clearly modernist panels in the Court of Fiestas.⁵⁰

While still working on his frescoes at the MPE, Rivera was invited to decorate two different parts of the main administration building of the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo. The building and surrounding land originally belonged to a 17th-century Jesuit *reducción* (a religious community that functioned thanks to Indian labor), but more recently they had been part of the Hacienda of San Jacinto.⁵¹ In the 1920s Chapingo became the new home of the National School of Agriculture, and the hacienda’s chapel was converted into the university’s auditorium. Rivera’s murals at Chapingo support the school’s attempt to teach and inspire Mexico’s future agricultural workers, following the motto: “*To teach the exploitation of the land, not the exploitation of men.*”⁵² Rivera’s decoration of the administration building (1924) includes panels depicting the distribution of the Hacienda of San Jacinto land, as well as the themes of good and bad government, which were likely inspired by Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fourteenth-century frescos in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.⁵³ In his decoration of the chapel, on the other hand (1926-27, Figure 7), Rivera compares social revolution to natural evolution, suggesting that

⁵⁰ Coffey, “‘All Mexico on a Wall,’” 57.

⁵¹ Helms, “*Universidad Autónoma Chapingo*,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 253.

⁵² “*Enseñar la explotación de la tierra, no la del hombre.*” Karen Cordero Reiman, “Los espacios de Chapingo: apuntes hacia una relectura,” in *Arte y espacio: XIX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, ed. Oscar Olea (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997), 214.

⁵³ Helms, “*Universidad Autónoma Chapingo*,” 253.

they are parallel inevitable processes.⁵⁴ His murals at Chapingo represent a social and political message about the power and importance of the peasantry, as well as that of Mexico's natural resources and land.

Rivera's monumental decorations of the MPE corridors and the Chapingo chapel reflect his interest in the Renaissance fresco cycles that he saw during his trip to Italy. Despite his use of encaustic for his first mural project, Rivera later recalled that he had gone to Italy "to study the frescoes of the old masters."⁵⁵ Of the many fresco cycles that he saw in Italy, Rivera seems to have been particularly interested in Andrea Mantegna's decoration of the Ovetari Chapel in the Eremitani church, which he sketched while visiting Padua (Figure 4). The chapel was rebuilt during the first half of the fifteenth century, after which Mantegna and three other painters were commissioned to decorate it with frescoes portraying the legends of St. James the Greater and St. Christopher. Rivera's sketch (Figure 5) depicts the six panels of the cycle that tells the story of Saint James the Greater, from "The Calling of the Apostles James and John" in the upper left, to "The Martyrdom of St. James" in the lower right.⁵⁶ Most of the Ovetari Chapel frescoes were destroyed in a World War II bombing, but at the time Rivera visited Padua the cycle would have covered the entire left wall of the chapel, reaching from just above the floor all the way to the vaulted ceiling.⁵⁷

Rivera's rendition of Mantegna's fresco cycle contains very few details; we see an outline of the overall shape of the wall, and a grid that shows how Mantegna divided it into six separate panels. Rivera simplifies Mantegna's composition to highlight his use of one-point perspective, converging all of the perspective lines in the separate panels towards a single

⁵⁴ Helms, "Universidad Autónoma Chapingo," 254.

⁵⁵ Rivera, *My Art, My Life*, 71.

⁵⁶ Keith Christiansen, *The Genius of Andrea Mantegna* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 10-15.

⁵⁷ Jane Martineau, ed., *Andrea Mantegna* (Royal Academy of Arts, 1992), 99.

vanishing point. Rivera's notes on this sketch describe a "construction where the actual painting of the surface follows guidelines relating to depth; thus creating a surface harmony shot through in make-believe style by the architecture."⁵⁸ These notes on the compositional structure of Mantegna's fresco help explain why Rivera may have been drawn to this particular cycle as a model for creating monumental art. Like the work of many Italian Renaissance artists, Mantegna's cycle demonstrates an increased effort to engage the spectator in the plot of the painted narrative.⁵⁹ For example, in a scene from the bottom tier of *Stories of St. James* Mantegna depicted a ground plane that slopes sharply downward, so as to create a vanishing point at the viewer's height; by converging all of the receding orthogonals in this panel to the viewer's eye level, Mantegna guarantees the spectator's dramatic and intellectual engagement in the scene.⁶⁰

Like his aforementioned sketches of a church interior and a mural scaffold, Rivera's fascination with Mantegna's fresco shows not only his admiration for the visually powerful medium, but also his attention to the challenges of painting large-scale murals. He was probably already thinking of murals as an art form with which to experiment upon his return to Mexico, so his notes and sketch would have later helped him remember Mantegna's compositional and technical strategies. Rivera's focus on linear perspective in his sketch and notes suggests his interest in the challenge of maintaining unity and consistency among the different components of such a large painting. However, Rivera was already a skilled easel painter by the time he visited Italy, so he would have been familiar with the concepts of perspective and compositional unity; instead, Mantegna's fresco may have served as an example of how to successfully relate a large-

⁵⁸ *Diego Rivera: The Italian Sketchbook 1920-21*, 26.

⁵⁹ John Shearman, *Only connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17.

⁶⁰ Keith Christiansen, *The Genius of Andrea Mantegna* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 11.

scale composition to its viewers. Whereas Rivera's cubist paintings had related to an avant-garde circle of his peers, the murals he created upon his return to Mexico establish a connection with a much broader audience. The powerful way in which Mantegna engages viewers in the drama of his painted scenes may have served as inspiration for Rivera's shift from easel painting to mural painting. Examining and sketching frescoes like Mantegna's would have helped him understand how to adapt his easel painting techniques to the creation of monumental works, in order to strengthen his connections with a wider range of viewers.

At the MPE and in the Chapingo Chapel we can see the influence of frescoes like Mantegna's on the overwhelming size of Rivera's murals. Like the frescoes that decorate the Ovetari Chapel, those at the MPE and Chapingo completely cover all of the available walls, and at Chapingo they even decorate the ceiling. By covering every wall surface, Rivera creates a visually stimulating environment that envelops viewers as they enter the frescoed space. Rivera also builds on Mantegna's engagement of his viewers in order to take advantage of the persuasive and didactic power of muralism. In *Stories of St. James*, Mantegna used a religious story as an opportunity to explore the drama of contemporary life, actively involving Christian audiences in the interpretation of scenes from the life of a saint.⁶¹ Rivera builds on this desire to engage viewers, but infuses his murals with a more overtly didactic message; his MPE frescoes were meant to persuade his public, including both members of the urban working class and bourgeois intellectuals, of the role of the Mexican Revolution as a precursor to a proletarian revolution, and the Chapingo frescoes were intended to inspire and guide students by teaching them about the natural and social power of Mexico's agricultural workers and land.⁶² Following the example of Renaissance artists such as Mantegna, Rivera decorated the MPE corridors and

⁶¹ Christiansen, *The Genius of Andrea Mantegna*, 14.

⁶² Coffey, "'All Mexico on a Wall,'" 60.

the Chapingo Chapel with monumental frescoes that could serve both an aesthetic and a didactic purpose.

Rivera's decoration of the MPE and the Chapingo chapel shows the various ways in which he attempted to resolve in his own mural painting the challenges that he observed in the Ovetari Chapel. Whereas Mantegna used one-point perspective to provide compositional unity and to draw spectators into his scenes, at the MPE Rivera relied on other compositional techniques to connect each floor's panels and to orient the viewer. For example, Rivera's use of earth tones in many of the panels on the first floor of the Court of Labor not only visually reflects the theme of agricultural labor, but also groups these panels together as a narrative unit. Additionally, this consistent color scheme allows the viewer's gaze to easily transition from one panel to the next. Meanwhile, the backwards-facing figures in many of Rivera's panels on the first floor of the Court of Fiestas situate the viewer as an active participant in the crowded festival scenes; spectators standing in front of these panels would feel as if they were standing in the midst of a bustling market or a gathering of peasants. Finally, on the third floor of the Court of Fiestas Rivera uses a red ribbon of text draped over the tops of the panels to lead viewers from one panel to the next (visible in Figure 15); the ribbon also serves to narrate this floor's murals in the form of a *corrido*, or a popular ballad.⁶³ Just as consistency in perspective is essential in Mantegna's depiction of a biblical story, Rivera's unification strategies at the MPE serve to engage spectators and connect the panels within each section of the cycle together, in order to clearly convey his political, social, and aesthetic messages.

Whereas Rivera's unification strategies at the MPE differ from one floor to the next and from one courtyard to the other, at the Chapingo Chapel he succeeds in connecting all of his mural panels under a single spectator-centered perspectival system. At each level of decoration –

⁶³ Helms, "Secretaría de Educación Pública," in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 246.

from the floor to the ceiling – the murals’ perspective adjusts in order to adapt to the position of the viewer.⁶⁴ In other words, Rivera creates a consistent and realistic perspective by representing figures at our eye level from a frontal point of view, while painting figures on the high walls and ceiling in a forced perspective that accounts for our angle of viewing (see Figure 24). This perspective system also serves to draw visitors into the action of the chapel’s decoration, making them feel like a part of each mural panel. An involvement of the viewer would have been particularly important to the success of the Chapingo murals as educational and inspirational ideals for the students who would see them. The colors in the Chapingo Chapel also function as a unifying element for the entire mural cycle; although each panel represents a different image and theme, they all feature similar earth tones and bright accents. In his own description of these frescoes, Rivera wrote that “the dominant tones were violet, green, red, and orange.”⁶⁵ His use of a viewer-oriented perspective system and a consistent color palette unifies his murals in the Chapingo chapel, much like Mantegna’s use of one-point perspective connects the various panels of his Ovetari Chapel frescoes.

In addition to Mantegna’s use of a unifying perspective system, Rivera may have been interested in his adaptation of the Ovetari Chapel’s existing architectural space. Rivera later recalled the connection between frescoes and architectural structures as the reason for his interest in fresco painting:

I preferred Fresco because in it all materials are analogous to the materials of architectural construction. Monumental painting does not have ornamentation for its objective, but the prolongation of the life of the architecture beyond time and space. Naturally, this cannot be realized if the roots of the painting do not penetrate deeply into architecture.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Cordero Reiman, “Los espacios de Chapingo,” 210-11.

⁶⁵ Rivera, *My Art, My Life*, 83.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Arquin, *The Shaping of an Artist*, 115.

As his first attempt at painting in fresco, Rivera's murals at the MPE illustrate this opinion on the connection between frescoes and the architectural spaces in which they are painted. Rivera's *Cosmography of Modern Mexico* compliments the existing architectural features of the newly-constructed MPE; for example, in *The Market/Tianguis* (Figure 10), Rivera not only creates his scene around the existing doorway, but even paints figures in a trompe l'oeil effect sitting on top of the door frame, as if it were a part of the outdoor market scene. (With their backs turned to the spectator, these figures also serve to draw the viewer into the action of the painted scene.) Similarly, Rivera painted his Chapingo frescoes without altering the chapel's original Spanish baroque architecture. Instead, he used his murals to highlight the existing pilasters, cornices, and vaults.⁶⁷

Ministry of Public Education Frescoes

Whereas frescoes such as Mantegna's *Stories of St. James* likely inspired Rivera's departure from easel painting and his interest in monumental and persuasive public art, the influence of other works of Italian Renaissance art is evident in the specific compositional structures of many of Rivera's MPE murals. Among the first panels Rivera painted at the MPE is one entitled *Tehuanas*, located on the north wall of the Court of Labor (Figure 9). The placement of this panel by the elevator shaft in the first courtyard ensures that viewers will see it almost immediately after stepping into the building. Approaching the elevators, visitors pass under a high arched doorway, flanked on either side by symmetrical groupings of immense female figures in a lush tropical landscape. On either side of the doorway Rivera painted one kneeling figure and two standing figures; one woman holds a basket overflowing with tropical fruits on her head, and the other balances a ceramic pot.

⁶⁷ Raquel Tibol, *Los murales de Diego Rivera: Universidad Autónoma Chapingo* (Chapingo: Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, 2002), 29.

While the content and style of Rivera's mural in the auditorium of the NPS does not seem to have been greatly affected by his 1922 visit to Tehuantepec, these female figures at the MPE clearly demonstrate the influence of that trip. Tehuanas, or women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, are known for their beauty, their traditional style of dress, and their reputation as leaders of a supposedly matriarchal society; in his panel at the MPE Rivera idealizes these female figures as symbols of Mexico's fertility and mestizo heritage.⁶⁸ According to Charlot, Rivera's tehuanas in the Court of Labor are based directly on his sketches from Tehuantepec (Figure 11).⁶⁹

In addition to the clear influence of the indigenous culture of Tehuantepec on this panel, the relationship between these larger-than-life figures and the comparatively small visitors who stand under the archway calls to mind Rivera's sketch of an Italian church interior (Figure 8). Like the large figure on the wall of the unknown church that Rivera sketched, the figures in *Tehuanas* are almost three times life size, and appear even larger because their feet rest on the ground well above viewers' eye level. This similar relationship in scale between viewers and painted figures suggests that in determining the composition of *Tehuanas* Rivera may have thought back to the monumental art that he had seen while in Italy. His sketches and memories of wall paintings like those in his church interior sketch may have served as a model for creating persuasively powerful murals, capable of leaving lasting impressions by overwhelming viewers with their monumental scale. By greeting visitors with these immense personifications of Mexico's indigenous culture, Rivera sets the stage for the didactic and monumental panels that make up the rest of his MPE cycle.

⁶⁸ Coffey, "All Mexico on a Wall," 62.

⁶⁹ Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 256.

In contrast to the simplified and open quality of the *Tehuana*s panel in the Court of Labor, many of the panels in the Court of Fiestas feature more densely-packed compositions. This change in compositional structure demonstrates Rivera's stylistic development as a muralist; crowded and shallow compositions are evident in many of his later murals in Mexico City, such as those in the stairway of the National Palace (1929-30), and at the Palace of Fine Arts (1934). Rivera's creation of densely-packed, shallow spaces could be attributed to his cubist background. In his essay, "Cubist Heresies: Diego Rivera and the Parisian Avant-Garde, 1913-1917," William H. Robinson writes that the cubists' "most radical and defining innovation was not an emphasis on geometry, but rather their rejection of the fixed perspective systems used by Western artists since the Renaissance to create the illusion of space receding behind the picture surface."⁷⁰ Instead of using a strict system of vanishing points seen from a specific perspective, cubist artists presented various points of view simultaneously.

In her essay about Rivera's murals at the MPE, Mary Coffey describes a panel entitled *The Market/Tianguis* (1923-24, Figure 10), with regards to these cubist techniques. *The Market/Tianguis* is located on the ground floor of the Court of Fiestas, and depicts a traditional outdoor market, bustling with vendors and shoppers. In contrast to the "humanizing positivist" style of Rivera's murals on the ground floor of the Court of Labor, Coffey describes the way in which the repeated geometric shapes of the *sombreros* in the center of this panel create a shallow space, and how Rivera chooses to represent various points of view at once, rather than a single vanishing point.⁷¹ The figures at the bottom of the panel face the viewer head-on, but we can also see the tops of the market stalls in the background, a view that is not compatible with the first vantage point. Coffey's analysis of the compositional techniques at play in *The Market/Tianguis*

⁷⁰ Robinson, "Cubist Heresies," 107.

⁷¹ Coffey, "All Mexico on a Wall," 57, 65-66.

suggests that Rivera was in fact able to apply elements of his cubist style to a Mexican subject matter, despite Vasconcelos' doubts about the relevance of cubism to a Mexican audience.

While we cannot ignore the influence of cubism on Rivera's use of multiple points of view to create compressed spaces, his sketches from Italy, in particular his sketch of the 15th-century painting, *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, suggest yet another source for these detailed and compacted compositions. *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden* (Figure 12) is thought to have been created by the Veronese artist, Stefano di Zevio (also known as Stefano da Verona) between 1425 and 1435.⁷² This painting portrays the Virgin Mary, in the center of the composition, sitting in a rose garden with the Christ Child on her lap and St. Catherine in the lower right corner. The figures are surrounded by angels, birds, and flowers, all painted on a gold background. The painting's lavish details are characteristic of the International Gothic style; in addition to the popularity of Giotto in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this style was prevalent in Italy around the year 1400.⁷³ The intricate and naturalistic plumage and flowers, however, contrast with the unrealistic portrayal of the space inside the rose garden. Di Zevio did not rely on the perspective techniques that were emerging during the fifteenth century to create an illusion of three-dimensional space. Instead, his use of scale to draw attention to the Madonna as the largest and most important figure more clearly reflects medieval painting styles.

Rivera's sketch of *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, probably created while visiting Verona, focuses on the geometric lines that make up the painting's composition (Figure 13). Rivera's main diagonal lines trace the edges of the heptagonal rose garden, but he adds additional lines to connect the painting's corners with other points measured out on the border of the composition. He pays little attention to the angels and birds, and creates only a very basic

⁷² *Diego Rivera: The Italian Sketchbook 1920-21*, 22.

⁷³ Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 36.

sketch of the female figures. The notes on this sketch provide us with a greater understanding of why Rivera may have been drawn to this particular painting. In addition to labeling the gold background color, Rivera comments on the “excellent surface composition,” and further describes his impression of the painting: “The Virgin and Child. All is gold outside of paradise. Within, all idea of optical scale is destroyed and all is in the spiritual order. It is extremely truthful and gentle.”⁷⁴ His comment on the destruction of optical scale probably refers to the size of the figures in *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*; the artist’s portrayal of the Madonna and the birds in the background as the same size as St. Catherine and the birds in the foreground goes against the natural way in which objects that are further away appear smaller. This absence of optical scale, typical of International Gothic paintings, draws our attention to the Madonna, and causes her to appear as if she is floating above St. Catherine, rather than sitting behind her.

Rivera uses a similar technique of manipulating optical scale in one of his fresco panels on the first floor of the Court of Fiestas at the MPE. *Urban Day of the Dead* (1923-24, Figure 14) is located on the South wall of this courtyard, and depicts a crowded street where members of different social classes come together to celebrate the Day of the Dead, a traditional Mexican holiday in which friends and family gather to remember and celebrate the deceased. The foreground and middle-ground of *Urban Day of the Dead* are packed with close to eighty figures, including a self-portrait of Rivera with his wife Guadalupe Marín.⁷⁵ These crowds are overshadowed by three huge *calavera*, or skeleton, puppets, dressed to represent the heroes of the Mexican people: the peasant, the armed revolutionary, and the urban worker.⁷⁶ Like *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, *Urban Day of the Dead* does not contain an

⁷⁴ Charlot, “Diego Rivera in Italy,” 6.

⁷⁵ Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 81.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

obvious vanishing point to which the compositional space recedes, and figures do not become consistently smaller as their distance from us increases. Instead, Rivera creates the illusion of receding space by tightly layering figures in the foreground, middle-ground, and background, creating a crowded composition and a highly compressed space.

Instead of employing a realistic system of scale to depict figures' relative positions in space, Rivera uses symbolic scale to draw viewers' attention to the most important elements of his composition, much like Stefano di Zevio does in *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*. Whereas di Zevio emphasizes the religious importance of the Virgin Mary by painting her much larger than St. Catherine, Rivera uses a similar technique to highlight the calavera puppets as symbols of Mexican culture and identity. Based on their large size and the detail with which they are painted, at first glance the calaveras look as if they are floating above the figures in the foreground, much as the Virgin Mary appears to float above St. Catherine in *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*. On the other hand, the presence of spectators' heads blocking the puppets' feet grounds them in the middle-ground of the composition, which causes them to appear even more monumental and impressive. By depicting the calaveras as puppets, Rivera justifies their enormous size in the context of his narrative scene; in the festive and carnivalesque environment of a Day of the Dead celebration, it seems almost plausible to find puppets that tower over both spectators and market stalls. However, Rivera's exaggeration of the calaveras' size serves not only to highlight their role as festival attractions, but also to demonstrate their importance as symbols of the working classes who, in the minds of intellectuals like Rivera, had joined together in the Revolution.

Rivera's calaveras reference the work of José Guadalupe Posada, an early-twentieth-century Mexican engraver who was known for his satirical broadsides. Rivera and other

muralists admired Posada for having educated Mexico's illiterate and semi-literate population through his simplified and often comical depictions of contemporary events and popular songs.⁷⁷ Rivera's introduction to a 1930 book on Posada demonstrates this view of Posada as an artist of the popular classes; he described Posada as the "interpreter of the pain, the joy, and the anguished aspiration of the people of Mexico" and the "illustrator of the stories and histories, the songs and the prayers of the poor people."⁷⁸ Posada's prints frequently featured calaveras, which serve as a constant reminder of death, the ultimate equalizer of social classes.⁷⁹ By invoking these calaveras in *Urban Day of the Dead*, Rivera attempts to ground this scene in popular culture and suggest a connection between himself and Posada, who he mythologized as his "the most important of [his] teachers."⁸⁰ In this panel Rivera draws on Stefano di Zevio's fifteenth-century compositional techniques to create a densely-compacted scene, and to focus our attention on the calavera puppets' importance as nationalistic symbols of popular culture.

Although Rivera painted the murals on the third floor of the Court of Fiestas four years after his completion of *Urban Day of the Dead*, the influence of his sketch after *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden* is also evident in the compositional structure of many of these later panels. For example, *Distribution of Arms* (1928), a panel on the South wall of third floor of the Court of Fiestas (Figure 15), presents an idealized image of urban workers and peasants joining together to fight the proletarian revolution. Workers raise their weapons, peasants ride in on horseback in the upper right corner of the panel, and his soon-to-be wife Frida Kahlo stands front and center, distributing arms. Dozens of overlapping figures and weapons come together to

⁷⁷ Diane Miliotes, *José Guadalupe Posada and the Mexican Broadside* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2006), 11.

⁷⁸ "interprete del dolor, la alegría y la aspiración angustiosa del pueblo de México," "ilustrador de los cuentos y las historias, las canciones y las plegarias de la gente pobre" Diego Rivera, "José Guadalupe Posada," in *Arte y Política*, ed. Raquel Tibol (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), 105.

⁷⁹ Miliotes, *José Guadalupe Posada and the Mexican Broadside*, 21.

⁸⁰ Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open*, 35.

form a pyramidal structure with an anonymous dark-skinned industrial worker at the apex, holding a communist flag.

Much like the intricate flowers and roses that surround the Madonna's head in *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, the background of *Distribution of Arms* is practically as detailed as the foreground. An enlarged detail of the upper right corner reveals how little Rivera relied on atmospheric perspective (Figure 16); instead, the words on the red flag in the upper right corner are easily legible, and contrary to the way that images fade in detail as they recede into the distance, here a spectator standing before the mural could count the number of individual sombreros painted in the background. As with *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, the intricate and realistic detail of each individual element of *Distribution of Arms* contrasts with the absence of a strict perspective system. In *Distribution of Arms*, as in *Urban Day of the Dead*, Rivera uses layered figures to create depth, rather than relying on optical scale or a unifying vanishing point.

Just as Stefano di Zevio focuses our attention on his large image of the Madonna, in *Distribution of Arms* Rivera again manipulates the scale of his figures to draw the viewer's eye to the most important part of the panel: the elevated worker at the top of the pyramidal composition. Based on the overlapping figures in front of him, we know that this worker stands in the middle-ground of the image; however, he appears almost as large as Kahlo, who stands in the foreground. By enlarging this central worker's body, Rivera emphasizes the important role of the working class in his imagined proletarian revolution.

Many other panels at the MPE, including *Urban Day of the Dead*, have similarly compressed and crowded compositions, but it was Rivera's depiction of Kahlo that initially drew me to *Distribution of Arms*. Although Stefano di Zevio and Rivera depict extremely different

scenes, I could not help but notice the similarities between Stefano's Madonna and Rivera's Kahlo. First of all, both women are dressed in red and black, a color scheme which seems fitting in the context of Rivera's communist iconography, but unusual for a depiction of the Virgin Mary, who is most often shown wearing blue. Furthermore, both females are painted with their bodies angled slightly towards their right, and are shown cradling symbols of future social and political change. The Madonna cradles the Christ Child in one of her arms, foreshadowing the future development of Christianity; similarly, Kahlo cradles a bundle of weapons, which may stand as a symbol for the revolution that Rivera predicted would occur.

The diagonals formed by the weapons in the foreground and middle-ground of *Distribution of Arms* also call to mind the many diagonal lines in Rivera's sketch of *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, which are less apparent in Stefano's original painting. The diagonals in Rivera's sketch seem to frame the Madonna; one line passes through her figure, but the rest lie adjacent or at a short distance from her, causing our eyes to trace a circle around her figure. The weapons held up behind and around Kahlo's figure in *Distribution of Arms* create a similar effect. If we were to extend the diagonals suggested by each weapon, we would be left with a web of lines encircling Kahlo's figure in the middle. Even without extending the existing lines, Rivera's positioning of the weapons in *Distribution of Arms* draws our attention to the central figure of Kahlo, much like how the diagonal lines in his sketch of *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden* highlight the Madonna's figure.

I would not go as far as claiming that Rivera had Stefano's Madonna in mind when painting Kahlo in *Distribution of Arms*. However, the similarities between these two images' compositional structures, manipulation of optical scale, and treatment of the central female

figures suggest that Rivera had not forgotten the Renaissance art he sketched in Italy when he was decorating the Court of Fiestas at the MPE.

Tintoretto and the Chapingo Chapel

We can clearly trace Rivera's artistic growth from the beginning of his work on *A Cosmography of Modern Mexico* in 1923 to his completion of the cycle in 1928; although the Chapingo Chapel murals were painted in the midst of this five-year period, they do not reflect these compositional and thematic developments evident at the MPE. Instead, Rivera seems to have addressed these two cycles separately, modifying the form and content of each set of murals based on its location and purpose.

Just as Rivera's allegories of good and bad government in the administration building of Chapingo clearly reflect Lorenzetti's Siena frescoes, the influence of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel is evident in Rivera's decoration of the Chapingo chapel. While we do not have evidence of Rivera creating any sketches of frescoes at the Vatican, he would surely have visited the Sistine Chapel during his time in Rome. In her essay, "Los espacios de Chapingo: Apuntes hacia una relectura," Karen Cordero Reiman suggests a gendered interpretation of the Chapingo chapel, but maintains that Rivera's murals follow "the antecedents of Giotto's Arena Chapel and Michelangelo Buonarroti's Sistine Chapel."⁸¹ Similarly, Raquel Tibol describes the ceiling of the chapel as "a sort of Mexican and Marxist-Leninist version of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel."⁸² I do not deny the clear influence of the Sistine Chapel on the composition of Rivera's Chapingo chapel frescoes; however, I suggest that we can gain new insights into the compositional

⁸¹ "Siguiendo los antecedentes de la capilla Arena de Giotto y la Sixtina de Miguel Ángel Buonarroti..." Cordero Reiman, "Los espacios de Chapingo," 210. In this essay, Cordero Reiman suggests that by entering and viewing the Chapingo chapel, the spectator symbolically penetrates both the female body and the earth. Based on her interpretation of the chapel as a projection of male desire, she suggests an alternative motto for the school: "To teach the exploitation of women, not of men."

⁸² "una especie de versión mexicana y marxista-leninista de la Capilla Sixtina de Miguel Ángel," Raquel Tibol, "Centenario del natalicio de Diego Rivera: Chapingo, guía de murales" (Carrasquilla, 1986), 45.

strategies of this cycle by looking to Rivera's sketches after Tintoretto paintings in the Doge's Palace in Venice.

The location and symbolic iconography of Tintoretto's paintings show that despite their different medium, they served a similar purpose to frescoes such as those painted by Mantegna in the Ovetari chapel. In fact, Tintoretto's use of oil painting as a medium for these works probably reflects a practical choice rather than a stylistic preference; frescoes are easily damaged by Venice's humid climate, so starting in the fifteenth century oil paintings began to take the place of frescoes on the walls of the Doge's Palace.⁸³ The Doge's Palace was home to Venice's most important political institutions, so Tintoretto's paintings were not only decorative, but were also meant to positively influence visitors' opinions about the Venetian government. Likewise, Rivera's frescoes in the Chapingo chapel serve a dual purpose: to decorate the existing space, and to educate students about the use of land and the power of the unified peasantry.

One of the sketches that Rivera created while visiting the Doge's Palace in Venice depicts Tintoretto's *Three Graces and Mercury*. *Three Graces and Mercury* (Figure 19) is one of four allegorical oil-on-canvas paintings that Tintoretto created for the Doge's Palace in Venice between 1577 and 1578.⁸⁴ The set was originally hung on the walls of the Atrio Quadrato, a square room where visitors waited to meet with the senators and the members of the *collegio*, the executive branch of the Venetian government. However, by the time Rivera visited the Doge's Palace, Tintoretto's paintings had been moved to another nearby waiting room, the Anticollegio.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alessandro Conti, *A History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007), 23.

⁸⁴ Roland Krischel, *Jacopo Tintoretto, 1519-1594* (Germany: Koemann, 2000), 124.

⁸⁵ Paola Rossi and Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane*, Vol. 2, (Electa, 1990), 73.

Tintoretto's *Three Graces and Mercury* measures approximately five feet by five feet, and portrays the elegant Graces of classical mythology, along with their attributes: the dice, the rose, and the myrtle branch.⁸⁶ The nude torsos of all three Graces are oriented diagonally, with their heads pointing towards the upper-left section of the canvas and their arms intertwined. Mercury appears in the upper-left of the painting, peering over the middle Grace's shoulder. The interlinking and parallel bodies of Tintoretto's three Graces probably stand for the unity of the Venetian state, while Mercury may personify the skill and shrewdness of the middle class, which contributed to the fortune of Venice in commercial trade.⁸⁷ The leaves and flowers that surround the four figures represent spring (each of Tintoretto's four allegorical paintings depicted one of the seasons), as well as the natural harmony and order of the Venetian state.⁸⁸ The female figures in *Three Graces and Mercury* highlight not only Tintoretto's interest in painting women, but also the influence of sculptural art on his painting style.⁸⁹ The solidity and the idealized curves of the Graces' bodies bring to mind representations of the female body in classical sculptures.

Rivera's sketch of *Three Graces and Mercury* (Figure 18) focuses on Tintoretto's composition and his use of light and color, though he also seems to draw inspiration from Tintoretto's use of female allegorical figures. Rivera simplifies the Graces' bodies into a series of separate curved lines that outline their legs, arms, and backs, while clearly maintaining the diagonal orientation of their upper bodies and heads. When looking at this sketch, our eye is immediately drawn to the strong diagonal lines that Rivera traced across his figures; these lines divide the image into triangular quarters, emphasizing the diagonal axis of the Graces' bodies, as well as the center of the canvas where the two diagonals meet. Rivera's exaggeration of the

⁸⁶ Krischel, *Jacopo Tintoretto*, 124.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Miguel Falomir, ed., *Tintoretto* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 28.

diagonals implied in Tintoretto's original work shows his interest in the painting's geometric compositional structure. On the other hand, the notes Rivera wrote in and around his sketch demonstrate a focus on Tintoretto's use of light and color. According to Jean Charlot, the practically illegible French notes below the sketch translate to: "Quite close to a window. A picture in which the composition is arrived at by color, determined by the effect and dynamism of the physical light."⁹⁰ Although Rivera's sketch focuses primarily on compositional elements, his notes show that he was also aware of Tintoretto's characteristic use of dramatic lighting and color to create an emotional effect on his viewers.⁹¹

The composition of the mural panel *The Earth Enslaved* (*Tierra esclavizada*, Figure 17) in the Chapingo Chapel calls to mind elements of both Tintoretto's *Three Graces and Mercury*, as well as Rivera's sketch of the painting. *The Earth Enslaved* (also translated as *Reactionary Forces*), is located towards the back of the Chapingo Chapel, on the upper section of the "Social Revolution" wall. In this panel Rivera paints a reclining nude female body with her back to the viewer. Surrounding her are three male figures that symbolize the "*trinidad negativa*" of capitalism, militarism, and clericalism.⁹² Though positioned in the middle of the composition instead of on the side, the large female figure in *The Earth Enslaved* resembles the body of the Grace on the far left of Tintoretto's *Three Graces and Mercury*. Both figures are oriented diagonally, with their heads towards the upper-left corner, their legs towards the lower-right, and their backs towards the viewer. Their right legs and the right sides of their backs face outwards, and are illuminated by highlights. The prominent grooves running down the center of the backs of Rivera's female figure and Tintoretto's Grace emphasize the diagonal angle of their bodies; we know from Rivera's sketch that he was particularly interested in the diagonal lines of

⁹⁰ Jean Charlot, "Diego Rivera in Italy," *Magazine of Art* 46 No. 1 (1953): 8.

⁹¹ Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, (Yale University Press, 1997), 224.

⁹² Tibol, *Universidad Autónoma Chapingo*, 74.

Tintoretto's composition. Finally, the curved, muscular back of Rivera's *Earth Enslaved* makes her appear solid and sculptural, like Tintoretto's Graces.

Although Tintoretto's Grace seems to have influenced the formal characteristics of the nude in Rivera's *The Earth Enslaved*, Rivera alters the symbolic meaning of this body. If Tintoretto's Grace stands for the unity and order of the Venetian government, Rivera's nude symbolizes Mexico and its people, prior to their unification through revolution, as metaphorically and literally enslaved by the powers of the church, the military, and capitalism. Her posture and nudity emphasize her resignation and her vulnerability; instead of confidently extending her neck and limbs like Tintoretto's Graces do, Rivera's female figure bows her head and bends her knees, as if to protect herself. Like the other female nudes in the Chapingo chapel, this one – modeled after Lupe Marin, Rivera's wife at the time – can be seen to represent the natural fertility of Mexico. Not only does she symbolically stand for Mexico, but she literally *is* Mexico; the female body itself creates the geographic shape of Mexico. With Baja California on her left arm, and the Yucatan Peninsula at her knees, Rivera's figure is a figural map of Mexico.⁹³

Like the Tintoretto Grace that she resembles, the female figure in Rivera's *The Earth Enslaved* appears surrounded by three other figures. Instead of featuring three Graces and another mythological figure, however, Rivera's composition depicts one Grace-like female figure and three figural symbols of what he considered to be the oppressors of modern society. These personifications of the clergy, the military, and capitalism are complete antitheses of the Graces; they are not charming or beautiful, but rather terrifying and ugly. While Tintoretto's trio of figures represents the positive characteristics of the Venetian government, Rivera's trio stands

⁹³ Tibol, *Universidad Autónoma Chapingo*, 74.

for just the opposite: the negative social and political forces that dominate the Mexican people and their land.⁹⁴

The dark plants in the foreground of *The Earth Enslaved* also contribute to the mural panel's menacing tone. Whereas Tintoretto surrounds his figures with bright flowering plants that are full of life, the leaves in the foreground of Rivera's mural are dark, spiny and unwelcoming. These leaves may represent the spines of a maguey cactus, a natural symbol of Mexico, but in this mural they do not serve an uplifting nationalistic purpose. Instead of alluding to the rebirth of springtime like the plants in *Three Graces and Mercury*, the spines resemble the sword held by the military figure, connoting violence and pain. Rivera positions the spines on the edge of the composition, as if to warn the viewer to keep a distance from the world depicted in this mural panel. While Tintoretto uses plant life to draw the viewer into the cheerful and flourishing environment of *Three Graces and Mercury*, the spiny plants in *The Earth Enslaved* emphasize the danger of a nation controlled by capitalism, clericalism, and militarism.

In addition to his focus on *Three Graces and Mercury*, Rivera's sketches demonstrate his interest in another aspect of Tintoretto's Venetian work: the decoration of the ceilings in the Doge's Palace. Between 1564 and 1565 Tintoretto painted the ceiling of the Atrio Quadrato, the same waiting room for which he created *Three Graces and Mercury* a decade later. The centerpiece of the Atrio Quadrato ceiling is an octagonal oil-on-canvas painting that depicts an allegorical scene in which Justice gives a sword to Doge Girolamo Priuli, the doge who commissioned the decoration of this room (Figure 22).⁹⁵ The personifications of Peace and Justice approach the doge from the left, while his patron saint, Jerome, watches over the scene

⁹⁴ Based on Karen Cordero Reiman's reading of the Chapingo Chapel murals, these three menacing figures may also represent the imposing forces of male desire that dominate the more passive feminine nature. Cordero Reiman, "Los espacios de Chapingo," 212.

⁹⁵ Rossi and Pallucchini, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane*, 73.

from above. The painting's placement on the ceiling, as well as its use of a lowered point of view, makes the figures look as if they were floating above us – an appropriate perspective for an allegorical scene that takes place in the clouds. Surrounding the central octagon is a series of narrow panels painted in grisaille that depict biblical stories and allude to wisdom, justice, and force (Figure 21). Tintoretto also includes personifications of the seasons; as in his other allegorical paintings in the Doge's Palace, these images represent the Venetian government's natural harmony.⁹⁶

Like his sketch of *Three Graces and Mercury*, Rivera's sketch of Tintoretto's ceiling (Figure 20) demonstrates his interest in the geometry of the ceiling's components, rather than just their allegorical significance. Rivera simplifies the ceiling even more than *Three Graces and Mercury*, drawing only the geometric outlines of the painted panels. He extends the diagonal sides of the central octagon to reach the edges of his sketch, and also adds faint intersecting diagonal lines that split the entire image into triangular quarters. This sketch suggests Rivera's attention to the geometric connections between the varying shapes of the ceiling panels; on the other hand, his notes around the sketch show his awareness of the style of the paintings themselves. About the central panel he writes: "Pictures in frontal perspective with very low horizon," and in reference to the surrounding narrow panels he notes: "The imitation bas-reliefs in monochrome painted in very warm tones."⁹⁷ Like his drawing of *Three Graces and Mercury*, Rivera's sketch of the Atrio Quadrato ceiling shows his focus on geometric composition; his notes reinforce that interest while also suggesting an interest in varying approaches to monumental narrative painting.

⁹⁶ Rossi and Pallucchini, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane*, 73.

⁹⁷ Charlot, "Diego Rivera in Italy," 10.

Rivera's decoration of the ceiling of the Chapingo Chapel (Figure 23) reflects the influence of the Tintoretto ceiling he observed and sketched in Venice. Rivera also divided his ceiling into repeating and symmetrical geometric shapes, even though his decoration had to cover a large vaulted ceiling with multiple bays (as opposed to the flat rectangular ceiling of the Atrio Quadrato). Each of the ceiling's three bays features a central hexagon surrounded by triangles of various sizes. Within these geometric shapes Rivera painted a series of almost nude male figures, some of which appear to float, while others recline against the sides of the shapes that enclose them. Although the central bay features one set of figures encircling a red star, seen as if from above, Rivera painted most of these nude males from a lowered perspective similar to that of Tintoretto's octagonal ceiling painting. This floating quality elevates the figures as if to present them as prophets and guardians.⁹⁸ As students sit in the auditorium, the figures overhead would appear to watch over them, while also guiding them in their studies and work.⁹⁹

While these male figures decorate the chapel's vaults, the red arches that support the barrel vault are superimposed with yellow trompe l'oeil painted panels that contain imagery depicting flowers, fruits, and agricultural tools (Figure 25). This effect is not unlike Tintoretto's use of grisaille panels on the Atrio Quadrato ceiling. Just as Tintoretto's grisailles symbolize the positive attributes associated with the Venetian government, Rivera's monochrome symbols support the overall agricultural, social, and nationalist themes of his Chapingo murals.¹⁰⁰ Rivera's use of this monochrome painting style also recalls the realistic study of a bas-relief that he did as a student at the Academy (Figure 1); in the Chapingo ceiling, he once again demonstrates his ability to paint two-dimensional images that appear to be three-dimensional.

⁹⁸ Helms, "Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo," in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 259.

⁹⁹ Although we do not have evidence of Rivera creating any sketches of frescoes at the Vatican, these nude male figures at Chapingo certainly call to mind Michelangelo's *Ignudi* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

¹⁰⁰ Rivera also drew on the technique of grisaille to create more detailed narrative scenes on the second floor of the MPE, and would return to it again in his decoration of the National Palace in Mexico City, in the 1940s.

The trompe l'oeil effect of Rivera's ceiling inspires viewer engagement, forcing the spectator to determine which parts of the decoration are architectural details and which are painted illusions.

As we saw with his use of elements from *Three Graces and Mercury*, the symbolic meaning of Rivera's ceiling differs greatly from that of the Italian art that inspired it. While the figures on the ceiling of the Atrio Quadrato represent the strength of the Venetian government, those on the ceiling of the Chapingo Chapel contain symbols that allude to Mexico (flames in the shape of the maguey cactus), and to the idea of a proletarian revolution (red stars, hammers, and sickles).¹⁰¹ Rivera's choice of red as the base color for the ceiling's arches also reflects his growing association with communist ideals. In contrast to the panels on the first floor of the MPE, in his decoration of the Chapingo chapel Rivera begins to infuse his murals with more explicit communist ideology; the continuation of this ideological development is evident in his use of communist symbolism on the third floor of the Court of Fiestas, as seen in *Distribution of Arms*.

In addition to the formal similarities between Rivera's Chapingo chapel murals and Tintoretto's paintings in the Atrio Quadrato, the functions of the two spaces lend themselves to a similar style of decoration. Although the Chapingo chapel was originally a Christian space, at the time of Rivera's decoration it was used as an auditorium; with this new function, the "chapel" had more in common with the Doge's Palace, a secular space devoted to civic ideals, than with religious spaces like the Arena Chapel or the Sistine Chapel. Both the Chapingo chapel and the Atrio Quadrato are spaces in which visitors would sit or wait for a prolonged period of time; guests would stop in the Atrio Quadrato while waiting to meet with the Venetian government, and students would sit in the Chapingo Chapel while listening to lectures or other events. While seated and waiting, visitors to both spaces would have time to look around at the painted walls

¹⁰¹ Helms, "Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, 259.

and ceiling. On the contrary, a corridor or an entryway would not encourage the same sort of leisurely observation. Following Tintoretto's example, Rivera decorated the Chapingo chapel with monumental propagandistic images, positioned such that students sitting in the Chapingo auditorium could easily and effortlessly observe them, and hopefully be persuaded by the symbolic messages surrounding them.

Conclusion

An analysis of Rivera's sketches of works from the Italian Renaissance demonstrates his interest in geometry and compositional structure. That interest carried forward as he developed his approach to making monumental didactic pictures for the Mexican nation. Many of the Italian works that Rivera chose to sketch feature strong geometric compositions, such as Tintoretto's ceiling panels, or linear perspective systems, like Mantegna's Ovetari Chapel fresco cycle. Rivera's sketches distill these geometric elements, as we can see in his simplification of the compositions of *Three Graces and Mercury* and *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*. Rivera used these geometry lessons to engage his viewers both at the MPE, where diagonal weapons direct our focus to the figure of Kahlo in *Distribution of Arms*, and at the Chapingo chapel, where the geometric division of the ceiling space calls attention to the symbols of agricultural labor and communist ideology.

Charlot suggests that Rivera focused on geometry because it was "the one safe common denominator between his work and that of the old masters."¹⁰² Although Rivera had departed from cubism before traveling to Italy, geometry seems to have remained a lens through which he analyzed and understood the artwork he saw there. However, Rivera's sketches and murals suggest that Charlot oversimplifies the importance of Rivera's Italian travels; based on the lessons that Rivera applied to his murals at the MPE and in the Chapingo chapel, it seems he was

¹⁰² Charlot, "Diego Rivera in Italy," 10.

even more interested in the persuasive and propagandistic power of the monumental works he viewed and sketched in Italy.

While Rivera's time in France and Spain exposed him to modernist styles and ideas, his trip to Italy reconnected him with his classical academic training. His sketches of Renaissance works demonstrate his curiosity about monumental painting techniques, his attention to geometric compositions, and his interest in religious and political allegories. Elements of the Italian Renaissance artwork that Rivera chose to sketch can be seen in the didactic and decorative murals that cover the corridors of the MPE, and the walls and ceiling of the Chapingo chapel. Stepping back from the technical lessons that he learned from his studies of specific Renaissance works, Rivera's trip to Italy had a profound effect on his overall development as an artist. Just before returning to Mexico, he jotted down some notes about the evolution of his artistic style; alongside the years "1920-1921," he wrote: "trip to Italy; a new tendency, to humanize."¹⁰³

This humanization, along with Rivera's return to a more representational style, suggests his Italian sketches may have served as a transition between his immersion in European modernism, and the art he would create upon his return to Mexico. Prior to his time in Italy, Rivera's work had been characterized by experiments in European modernist styles, which he applied to easel paintings displayed in avant-garde exhibitions. In contrast, Rivera returned to Mexico with a desire to create figurative and didactic murals, with the expressed hope and purpose of reaching a wider audience. Rivera's sketches from Italy demonstrate the essential role that this trip played in defining both the form and content of his Mexican murals. As Coffey demonstrates, Rivera's new interest in humanism is evident in the neo-primitive style of his murals on the first floor of the Court of Labor at the MPE. Although he departs from this style in

¹⁰³ Charlot, "Diego Rivera in Italy," 10.

his increasingly social-realist decoration of the Chapingo chapel and the Court of Fiestas, Rivera continues to draw on his Italian lessons, using his murals as a persuasive means for redefining Mexico's cultural identity and broadcasting this new definition to his Mexican public.

Chapter 2: Historical Revival in Fascist Italy: Achille Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* Frescoes

Painted between 1934 and 1937, Achille Funi's fresco cycle in the Palazzo Comunale of Ferrara serves as an example of the historical revival that occurred under the Italian Fascist regime. In an attempt to legitimize the regime and create a common national identity, the Fascist government sponsored a range of cultural revivals that promoted a highly manipulated version of Italy's Roman and Renaissance past. On a smaller scale, Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* fresco cycle proudly celebrates Ferrara's legendary history by drawing inspiration from Italian Renaissance art; as monumental wall paintings commissioned by a Fascist leader and created for a public building, Funi's frescoes also demonstrate the role of public art in engaging the masses under Fascism in a cultural program of ideological unification.

Historical Revival and Arts Patronage under Fascism

The glorification of Italian history was an important element of Benito Mussolini's multifaceted propaganda campaign. Although Italy was unified as a country in the mid-nineteenth century, by the 1920s great divisions still remained among the nation's regions. In order to present a strong international image and justify the superiority of the Italian people and their government, the Fascist regime hoped to establish a common national identity, or *italianità*, that would unite all Italians under their shared history. However, Italian history was characterized by strong regional identities, dialects, and traditions. Instead of focusing on one specific era of Italy's past, the Fascist government drew on various phases of history, including Roman

antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, attempting to join them into a continuous narrative that would include all Italians in the glorification of their nation's past.¹

The most obvious era of Italian history on which to build a proud common identity was ancient Rome, and the most visible glorification of the Roman Empire, or *romanità*, naturally took place in the city of Rome. By restoring, or “liberating” ancient monuments from the modifications that had occurred over the centuries, tearing down modern buildings to showcase ancient ones, and building new structures in the classical style, Mussolini hoped to transform Rome into “a marvel to all the peoples of the world: vast, ordered, powerful, as it was during the first empire of Augustus.”² The Fascist regime also celebrated the Roman ideals of justice and order in government, as proof that it was directly descended from Italy's ancient past.³ In general, the regime glorified the Roman Empire as a demonstration of Italy's political superiority, and as a justification for Fascist imperialism.⁴ Mussolini's self-given nickname, *il duce*, demonstrates the connection he wished to establish between himself and ancient Rome; *duce* is the Italian version of *dux*, which means “leader” in Latin and was adopted by many Roman emperors.⁵ The 1937 *Mostra augustea della romanità* exemplifies the Fascist obsession with Roman history. Scheduled to commemorate the two thousandth anniversary of Emperor Augustus' birth, this exhibition compared Mussolini's political, military, and urban planning

¹ Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 3.

² Mussolini, quoted in Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2012), 50.

³ Claudia Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation,” in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, 14.

⁴ After Italy's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, Mussolini declared the creation of the Italian Empire, also referred to as the “New Roman Empire.” For details on Italian imperialism, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 7.

achievements to those of the Roman Empire, and highlighted ancient Roman monuments by demolishing constructions from more recent eras of Italian history.⁶

On the other hand, the *Mostra augustea della romanità* also highlighted Italy's Renaissance past, celebrating Renaissance figures such as Palladio, Machiavelli, and Leon Battista Alberti as essential contributors to the contemporary knowledge of antiquity.⁷ Artists and intellectuals from the Renaissance were celebrated for their study and imitation of classical ideals, which foreshadowed the Fascist regime's own return to *romanità*. Renaissance architectural revivals also occurred in Rome; for example, Palazzo Venezia, the building that housed Mussolini's office, was restored to its original Renaissance style.⁸ Whereas the celebration of Roman antiquity was centered in Rome and was used to legitimize imperial expansion, the glorification of the Renaissance occurred mostly outside of Rome, and served to create a unifying national and cultural identity. Not surprisingly, this Renaissance revival grounded itself in what had been the center of Italian culture during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries: Tuscany.

In her study of Renaissance revivals in fascist Italy, Medina Lasansky observes that when invoking this era of Italian history, the Fascist government preferred to use the term *Medioevo*, which brought to mind the populist quality of the communal period of the Late Middle Ages, rather than *Rinascimento*, which was associated with aristocracy and corruption.⁹ This negative view of the Renaissance may relate to the socialist origins of Fascist ideology; furthermore, the Risorgimento government of King Vittorio Emanuele II had frequently invoked the term *Rinascimento*, so the twentieth-century disregard for this word may also suggest the Fascists'

⁶ Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 108.

⁷ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 10.

⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

desire to distance themselves from the Italian royal family.¹⁰ Despite the negative associations of the *Rinascimento* with the aristocratic *signorie*, Mussolini was often compared to Renaissance princes such as Lorenzo de' Medici for his role as a patron of the arts and a social reformer.

This preference for the *Medioevo*, which was also evident in late-nineteenth-century historical projects, was mostly discursive; aspects of both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were celebrated and recreated in architecture, visual arts, festivals, and other cultural areas. Possibly because of this discursive ambiguity, or because of the Fascist desire to form a relevant and continuous historical narrative, projects intended to revive the Middle Ages or the Renaissance usually combined elements of both, and were often not at all faithful to either historical period. Buildings and festivals were designed to reflect a general idea of the styles and traditions of the *Medioevo*, but plans were often based more on an imagined and idealized history than on actual evidence.

In addition to serving as a steppingstone between Italy's ancient past and the twentieth century, the Renaissance also represented Italy's cultural superiority. Celebrations of the Renaissance therefore focused on reviving the "Golden Age" of Italian art, architecture, and cultural events. As Lasansky discusses, Florence underwent architectural transformations just like those occurring in Rome, but with a focus on the "liberation" of medieval and Renaissance buildings instead of ancient monuments. In addition to architectural reconstructions, this Renaissance revival involved the recreation of medieval and Renaissance festivals, and the celebration of cultural figures such as Petrarch and Giotto through exhibits and other commemorative events. Hitler's 1938 visit to Italy included a day in Florence, where Fascist officials led him on a carefully-crafted tour with stops at many of the city's important architectural sites, as well as at an exhibition of Renaissance cultural achievements. After

¹⁰ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 22.

highlighting military and imperial strength in Naples and Rome, Mussolini hoped to use Florence to demonstrate the cultural superiority of Italy's past, present, and future.¹¹

The Fascist government was not the first to seize upon Italy's Renaissance and medieval past as a source of nationalism and unification. During the mid-nineteenth-century Risorgimento, Republican Florence was seen as a model political system, and Italy's unification was considered a rebirth, much like that of the Renaissance.¹² This interest in Renaissance government was combined with an interest in Renaissance art, literature, and architecture, and continued throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The thirteenth-century Palazzo del Podestà was restored between 1858 and 1865 and transformed into the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.¹³ Similarly, Florence's duomo was given a new façade in 1887, designed to reflect the city's native style.¹⁴

Mussolini was able to build on this existing tradition of historical revival, but the Fascist celebration of the past took on various new characteristics. First of all, Mussolini played a prominent role in the connection of Italy's past to its modern state, as he frequently compared himself to political, military, and cultural heroes from Italy's past, ranging from Augustus to Dante. Secondly, the Fascist regime institutionalized the revival of the past; although local leaders took control of regional revivals, these projects were usually funded and overseen by the Ufficio delle Antichità e Belle Arti, a branch of the central government's Ministry of Public Instruction.¹⁵ Additionally, whereas the Risorgimento's revival had involved mostly the elite members of Italian society, the Fascist regime made a strong effort to include the general public

¹¹ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 84.

¹² *Ibid*, 20, 25.

¹³ Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, Cristina Danti, and Elena Carrara, *La storia del Bargello: 100 capolavori da scoprire* (Siena: Banca Toscana, 2004), 11.

¹⁴ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 184-5.

in the celebration of their country's past. Historical sites were no longer just destinations for elite tourists, but became centers of patriotism and pride for all Italians. This involvement of the masses was made possible by the use of modern forms of media such as film, radio, photography, and public art.¹⁶

Just as multiple eras of Italy's past were celebrated under Fascism, the regime also allowed for the development of multiple artistic styles. Rather than attempt to define an art of the State, like in Nazi Germany, Mussolini declared that art belonged "to the domain of the individual," and that the State's role was "not to undermine art, [but] to provide humane conditions for artists, and to encourage them from the artistic and national point of view."¹⁷ Through state-sponsored exhibitions, commissions, and competitions, Mussolini provided support for artists who expressed *italianità* and who were not overtly antifascist.¹⁸ Specifically, the Fascist government gained the support of many artists through the *Sindacato fascista delle belle arti* (Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts), which grouped artists into eighteen locally-run syndicates, through which they were encouraged to participate in provincial, interprovincial, and national exhibitions.¹⁹ Despite the central government's obsession with Roman history, the *Sindacato*, like other nation-wide Fascist organizations, was modeled after the medieval system of guilds and corporations.²⁰

In her book, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, Marla Stone describes the heterogeneity of art forms that existed under Fascism as "hegemonic pluralism," which she defines as the "semblance of pluralism that coexists within and gives legitimacy to a

¹⁶ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 255.

¹⁷ Mussolini as quoted in Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁸ Lazzaro, "Forging a Visible Fascist Nation," 14.

¹⁹ Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 25-27

²⁰ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 81-82.

repressive regime.”²¹ In other words, it was not a lack of interest in the arts that allowed for this aesthetic pluralism; on the contrary, the Fascist regime had specific and calculated reasons for supporting a range of artistic styles. By openly funding artists, the regime gained their support, thereby attempting to avoid the emergence of an antifascist artistic opposition. These loyal artists were then seen as a tool for gaining the support and consent of other Italians.²² However, artistic groups such as the Sei di Torino and the artists and intellectuals involved in *Corrente* magazine still managed to express antifascist points of view during this period.²³

In the early 1930s frescoes, mosaics, statues, and other forms of public art became an important part of the regime’s arts patronage. Exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and the Rome Quadriennale, which were at the top of the syndicate’s system of exhibitions, began to include fresco painting competitions, and efforts were made to encourage middle-class Italians to see these exhibits.²⁴ Like other European governments, the Fascist regime may have been interested in public art as a means for discovering a national identity that could be relevant and available to all citizens, not just to the elite. The long history of public art forms in Italy also connected these Fascist commissions to the country’s artistic traditions, affirming the larger celebration of the past under Fascism.

Historical Revival in Ferrara

While the focus on Italy’s medieval and Renaissance greatness took Florence as its capital, other cities in Tuscany and the surrounding northern regions experienced similar cultural revivals. Ferrara, located less than one hundred miles from Florence, in the region of Emilia-Romagna, had been the center of the Este family’s rule from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

²¹ Stone, *The Patron State*, 65.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mario De Micheli, *L’arte sotto le dittature* (Feltrinelli Editore, 2000), 103.

²⁴ Ibid, 118.

Like the Medici in Florence, the Este rulers were great patrons of the arts, sponsoring artists such as Cosmè Tura and Francesco del Cossa, as well as writers such as Torquato Tasso and Ludovico Ariosto. The Este family ruled Ferrara until 1598, at which point the city came under control of the papacy.

Historical revival in Ferrara focused on returning the city to the cultural glory it had reached under the Este rule during the Renaissance. Restorations and reconstructions in Ferrara therefore focused on the city's history from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, disregarding the changes that took place after the papacy gained control of the city.²⁵ Although these conservation initiatives supported the central government's celebration of Italy's grand history, political leaders in Ferrara had shown interest in a large-scale restoration project even before the rise of the Fascist regime. Throughout the 1920s and '30s, local officials maintained a great degree of control over restoration projects, often overriding concerns from the central government. In restoring old buildings, Ferrara officials hoped to turn the city into a more desirable tourist destination, undo the traces that the papal government had left throughout the past centuries, reduce unemployment, and most importantly, return Ferrara to the glory it had experienced as an important Renaissance court.²⁶

Much of Ferrara's historical revival during the Fascist regime took place in and around the Palazzo Comunale. Also known as the Palazzo del Corte or Corte Vecchia, this building was originally an Este family palace, constructed around the beginning of the thirteenth century. The Palazzo Comunale faces the Cathedral across the main civic square, and during the Renaissance it contained the offices of the *podestà* (the mayor), a communal council meeting room, and law

²⁵ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte in Ferrara," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, 108.

²⁶ Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte," 99.

courts.²⁷ This building also served as a setting for a range of public and private events; in the sixteenth century it housed Ferrara's first permanent theater, where Ariosto's comedies were recited.²⁸ Throughout the Este rule the Palazzo Comunale experienced several fires; necessary reconstructions allowed each prince to contribute his own touch to this building. Courtyards, facades, and sculptures were added, and it is thought that the palace at one point contained frescoes by Giotto and later by Piero della Francesca.²⁹ By the beginning of the twentieth century the Palazzo Comunale maintained very little of its original style or function. Some communal offices were still housed there, but parts of the palace had been bought and maintained by separate individuals, so the building had lost its unified feeling.³⁰

In 1923 a competition was held to collect plans for the restoration of the Palazzo Comunale, inspired by the existing structure and ancient drawings. The tower and façade were to be returned to their fourteenth-century appearance; however, since very little was known about what the Palazzo Comunale had looked like then, designs were based on a general image of fourteenth-century architecture, and elements that did not fit this highly constructed style were left out.³¹ Although this project was supported by the central government, local officials in Ferrara maintained a large degree of autonomy, so we cannot know to what extent they supported Fascist policies.³²

Other historical revivals in Fascist-era Ferrara included the reconstruction of two statues of Niccolò and Borso d'Este that had stood outside the Palazzo Comunale, as well as the 1933 celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the death of the Renaissance poet Ludovico

²⁷ Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte," 102.

²⁸ Ella Noyes, *The Story of Ferrara* (London: JM Dent & co., 1904), 279.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

³⁰ Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte," 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 112.

Ariosto. In order to commemorate Ariosto and the time period in which he lived, his comedies were performed and reprinted, an exhibit of objects relating to Ariosto and sixteenth-century Ferrara was held in his house, the Palazzo dei Diamanti put on an exhibition of Renaissance art from Ferrara, and the palio festival was reintroduced.³³ The Ferrara palio was a horse race dating back to the thirteenth century, at which time it was sponsored by the Este and occurred on religious holidays and other special occasions. After the Este family lost control of Ferrara, the palio was held less frequently, and the last one had occurred in 1860.³⁴ The revival of the palio for the Ariosto celebrations was intended in part to demonstrate the renewed glory of Ferrara under Fascism, so connections were exaggerated between the Este rule and Fascism. In her essay “Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle,” Diane Ghirardo suggests that the Fascist government in Ferrara modeled its revivals on the Este family’s past with the goal of surpassing what the Estes had accomplished, just as the Este family had hoped to do by modeling themselves on the Roman Empire.³⁵ In the palio and other historical revivals in Ferrara, the Este rule was celebrated as a time of prosperity and high culture; revivals ignored the severe social inequality that had existed in Ferrara during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.³⁶

Achille Funi and the *Mito di Ferrara*

Achille Funi (Virgilio Socrate Achille Funi) was born in Ferrara in 1890. He began studying art in Ferrara at a young age, and in 1906 he moved with his family to Milan, where he studied figure painting at the Accademia di Brera. In Milan Funi began to associate himself with the Futurist movement, and during World War I he joined Marinetti, Boccioni, and several other

³³ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism (Apr., 1996): 358, Giuseppe Ravegnani, Comitato ferrarese per le onoranze del IV centenario a Ludovico Ariosto, Ferrara, *Guida--catalogo della mostra iconografica ariosteana che si tiene nella casa del poeta, 7 maggio--27 luglio 1933*, 1933.

³⁴ Ghirardo, “Città Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle,” 360.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 362.

Futurists in the Lombard Volunteer Cyclist Battalion. After the war Funi returned to Milan, where he participated in the foundation of the Fasci di Combattimento, the political league that later evolved into the National Fascist Party.³⁷ During the 1920s Funi was an active participant in the Novecento group, which drew inspiration from Italy's artistic tradition, and was closely associated with the developing Fascist party.³⁸

Funi's mural career began in the early 1930s with his participation in various state-sponsored temporary exhibitions, including the 1930 Monza Triennale and the 1932 Mostra della rivoluzione fascista, a political exhibition that celebrated the ten-year anniversary of Fascist rule. For the 1933 V Triennale in Milan he created a mural entitled *Giochi Atletici Italiani (Italian Athletic Games)*, in which he compared classical athletics to modern games and sports.³⁹ The V Triennale had been largely organized by Mario Sironi, with whom Funi had worked as a Futurist, but the exhibition was criticized for the inconsistency in its murals' themes, styles, and techniques. (Instead of painting in fresco, Funi, Sironi, De Chirico and the other participating artists had used a modern industrial chemical that caused their murals to begin to disintegrate even before the start of the exhibition.⁴⁰) In response to the controversy that had ensued over the murals at the Triennale, Sironi wrote the "Manifesto della pittura murale" (Manifesto of Muralism, 1933, discussed in Chapter 3), which was cosigned by Funi and two other muralists, Carlo Carrà and Massimo Campigli.

³⁷ Achille Funi, *Achille Funi: Comune Di Ferrara, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna Palazzo Dei Diamanti*, 29 *Giugno-10 Ottobre 1976* (Cento: Siaca arti grafiche, 1976).

³⁸ For details on the Novecento movement, see Rossana Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento italiano": storia, documenti, iconografia* (Milan: Charta, 1995), Walter Adamson, "Avant-garde modernism and Italian Fascism: cultural politics in the era of Mussolini," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2001): 230-248, Elena Pontiggia, *Da Boccioni a Sironi: il mondo di Margherita Sarfatti* (Milan: Skira, 1997).

³⁹ Susanna Weber, *Achille Funi e la pittura murale fra le due guerre* (Florence: SPES, 1987), 32-38.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Flash Memories," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, ed. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 2005), 235.

In championing muralism as the art of the State, Funi, Sironi, Carrà, and Campigli began yet another historical revival, similar to those promoted by the Fascist regime. In the sixteenth century Giorgio Vasari wrote that of all artistic media, fresco was the “most masterly and beautiful...the most virile, most secure, most resolute and durable.”⁴¹ The Risorgimento-era frescoes in the railway station and the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan demonstrate that the fresco technique was still employed throughout the nineteenth century. However, since these frescoes were painted by second- and third-tier artists in an academic style, Romy Golan suggests that they were created mostly out of habit, rather than as a conscious departure from easel painting; in fact, many Italian artists of this period embraced easel painting in an attempt to follow northern European Salons and expositions.⁴² The revival of fresco art in the 1930s therefore created another link between the Fascist era and the Italian Renaissance.

Funi’s art had demonstrated a strong interest in Italy’s artistic past even before he began to paint frescoes. Many of his early murals, such as *Giochi Atletici Italiani* (1933), contain references to ancient Roman art and culture. In 1925, Margherita Sarfatti, a journalist, art critic, and mistress to Mussolini, described Funi’s painting as “essentially Italic and traditional,” but also grounded in modernity.⁴³ In an article published in 1934, entitled “Rientriamo nella storia” and analyzed in Chapter 3, Funi himself explained the need for a return to artistic traditions in order for art to progress.⁴⁴ This fascination with Italy’s artistic history, in addition to Funi’s personal ties to Ferrara, contributed greatly to what would become his most famous cycle: the *Mito di Ferrara*.

⁴¹ “il più maestrevole e bello...il più virile, più sicuro, più risoluto e durabile,” quoted in Francesco Negri Arnoldi, *Il Mestiere Dell'Arte: Introduzione Alla Storia Delle Tecniche Artistiche* (Napoli: Paparo, 2001), 67.

⁴² Golan, *Muralnomad*, 3.

⁴³ “prettamente italica e tradizionale,” Margherita Sarfatti, *Achille Funi* (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1925), 9.

⁴⁴ Lucio Scardino et al., *Achille Funi e Il" Mito Di Ferrara.* (Ferrara: Belriguardo, 1985), 52.

In 1934 Italo Balbo, the *ras*, or local Fascist leader of Ferrara, commissioned Funi to decorate the Palazzo Comunale's Sala dell'Arengo with scenes from myths and stories of Ferrara's past. Balbo's personal connection to Ferrara and his role in the Fascist government help to explain his interest in this fresco cycle, which eventually became known as the *Mito di Ferrara*. Born in a suburb of Ferrara, Balbo was seen as the ideal Fascist; he had participated in the March on Rome, and was Minister of Aviation from 1926 until 1933, when Mussolini appointed him as governor of the newly-colonized Libya.⁴⁵ Due to his bravery as a soldier and aviator, his patronage of the arts, and his charming personality, Balbo was often compared to Renaissance princes and *condottieri*, the Renaissance leaders of mercenary soldiers. Balbo embraced his reputation as a "reincarnation of the militant and magnificent Italian princes of medieval days,"⁴⁶ and once even signed a cartoon of himself as "nephew of Borso d'Este."⁴⁷ It is not surprising that Balbo would have chosen Funi, a native of Ferrara whose previous work was already based in Italy's artistic past, to create a fresco cycle celebrating Ferrara's legendary history.

Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* frescoes completely cover the four walls of the 40 by 30 foot Sala dell'Arengo, also known as the Sala della Consulta (Figures 26 and 27). This cycle features five large panels, two on each long wall, and one on the short western wall. Each panel depicts a story from Ferrara's mythical past: the western wall tells a Christian story (St. George, the patron saint of Ferrara, slaying the dragon), the northern wall portrays a Greek myth (Phaeton, who drove his father's sun chariot too close to the Earth and supposedly crashed into the Po river), as well as a fifteenth-century historical event (the execution of the lovers Ugo and Parisina by Niccolò III d'Este), and the southern wall illustrates two Renaissance epic poems (Ludovico

⁴⁵ Claudio G Segre, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (University of California Press, 1990), xii.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Segre, *Italo Balbo*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 125.

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*). On either side of the scene of St. George, as well as to the sides of the three windows on the eastern wall, Funi painted four statuary nude male figures, representing four classical gods: Apollo, Mercury, Mars, and Hercules. Unlike the rest of the wall decorations, these figures do not relate directly to Ferrara's history; however, the red color of the background from which they emerge calls to mind the color of the bricks that characterize Ferrara's architecture.⁴⁸

Above the five legends and four nude males, the walls of the Sala dell'Arengo begin to curve inwards toward the ceiling; on this upper section of the walls Funi painted twelve figures as symbols of the months and the field work associated with each season. The corners of this upper band display still lifes, which draw the eye up to the ceiling decoration. Here, the signs of the zodiac provide a border for a trompe l'oeil balcony scene, in which women in modern-day attire look down over a railing at the room below.

Funi separates the multiple panels on the walls of the Sala dell'Arengo with a series of pilasters with Corinthian capitals; while some of these pilasters are three-dimensional structures, others are trompe l'oeil pilasters and together they serve to frame the fresco panels. The pilasters, statuary nudes, and large panels rest on a band of trompe l'oeil marble that runs along the base of all four walls. The ceiling images, on the other hand, are separated by ornamental floral bands and rest on top of a frieze that is decorated with plants and trompe l'oeil medallions.

The overall composition of Funi's cycle, as well as many details within his individual scenes, calls to mind the Renaissance fresco cycle in the Sala dei Mesi of Ferrara's Palazzo Schifanoia (Figure 28). Painted between 1466 and 1470 by a group of Ferrara artists (including Ercole de'Roberti, Francesco del Cossa, and Cosmè Tura), the Sala dei Mesi is among the largest

⁴⁸ Scardino, *Achille Funi*, 28.

surviving secular cycles from fifteenth-century Italy.⁴⁹ It was commissioned by Borso d'Este, the first Duke of Ferrara, as a celebration of his own success as a popular and virtuous leader who brought Ferrara to its golden age.⁵⁰ The walls of the Sala dei Mesi are similarly divided by trompe l'oeil pilasters into twelve panels to represent the months of the year. Each panel is then separated into three horizontal bands, which portray the Olympian gods who watch over the months (upper band), the signs of the zodiac (middle band), and the life and accomplishments of Borso d'Este (lower band).⁵¹

Growing up in Ferrara, Funi's father often took him to see the Schifanoia frescoes, and the influence of Ferrarese Renaissance art can also be seen in some of his earlier easel paintings. For example, Funi's 1921 bust portraits of his sister and mother call to mind Renaissance painted portraits, including those by Francesco del Cossa.⁵² In *Officina ferrarese*, published the year that Funi began his Palazzo Comunale frescoes, the Italian art historian Roberto Longhi discusses Renaissance painting in Ferrara, with a particular focus on the *officina*, or workshop of painters, that contributed to the decoration of the Sala dei Mesi.⁵³ Longhi's text was inspired by the 1933 exhibit of Renaissance art in Ferrara, which may have served as inspiration for Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* as well.

Like the Sala dei Mesi, Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* cycle completely covers the room, creating a pictorial envelope that surrounds and overwhelms the viewer at first sight. Although each of Funi's large panels illustrates a different story, they are united under the overarching theme of Ferrara's mythical past, just as the separate months in the Sala dei Mesi come together

⁴⁹Steffi Rottgen, *Italian Frescoes Vol. 1, The Early Renaissance, 1400-1470* (New York : Abbeville Press, 1996), 408.

⁵⁰Ibid, 409.

⁵¹Ibid, 413-17.

⁵² Scardino, *Achille Funi*, 15, 21.

⁵³ Roberto Longhi, *Officina ferrarese* (Roma: Edizioni d'Italia, 1934), Steffi Rottgen, *Italian Frescoes Vol. 1, The Early Renaissance, 1400-1470* (New York : Abbeville Press, 1996), 410.

to celebrate Borso d'Este's rule. While the main theme of the Sala dell'Arengo differs from that of the Sala dei Mesi, the symbolic representations of the months and constellations on Funi's ceiling are reminiscent of the middle band of the Schifanoia months. Funi's use of trompe l'oeil architectural elements may also have been inspired by the Sala dei Mesi, in which the months are also separated by faux pilasters that appear to rest on a band of painted marble.

While Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* cycle was likely inspired by the fifteenth-century Sala dei Mesi, it is also important to take into account the effect of the historical context of the 1930s on this recreation of Renaissance styles and themes. Just as Borso d'Este wished to surround his visitors with images of his political greatness, the Fascist regime used modern forms of propaganda and media (radio, cinema, public art, etc.) to influence Italians' beliefs. Walking into a completely decorated room like the Sala dell'Arengo, one cannot help but feel a sense of admiration for Ferrara's cultural greatness and rootedness in history. Regardless of Funi's individual political views, the images and emotions that his fresco cycle conjures go along precisely with the Fascist regime's reasons for invoking Italy's Renaissance past.

The panel dedicated to *Orlando furioso* (Figure 29), located on the southern wall of the Sala dell'Arengo, demonstrates the formal influence of the Sala dei Mesi on Funi's frescoes, and also contains subtle references to the Fascist era in which it was painted. This panel depicts multiple scenes from Ariosto's sixteenth-century epic poem, *Orlando furioso*, which is a continuation of Boiardo's fifteenth-century *Orlando innamorato* and takes place during a war between Charlemagne's Christian paladins and a Saracen army led by the African king Agramante.⁵⁴ Against this militaristic backdrop, Ariosto sets the complex story of Orlando, a paladin who falls in love with the pagan princess Angelica. When Angelica elopes with the

⁵⁴ Peter Marinelli, "Narrative Poetry," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 234-240.

Saracen knight Medoro, Orlando's love and jealousy drive him mad. Astolfo, an English knight, rides a hippogriff to the moon in an attempt to find a cure for Orlando's madness. Astolfo finds Orlando's lost wits on the moon and brings them back in a vial; upon sniffing them Orlando is cured of his madness and love. Ariosto's story was particularly relevant to Renaissance Ferrara because another set of lovers in the epic, the Christian warrior Bradamante and the Saracen Ruggiero, were believed to be ancestors of the Este family.⁵⁵

In Funi's depiction of this story, our eye is drawn first to the huge central figure of Orlando, who climbs a rocky mountain, mostly nude, and carrying a shepherd by his feet (Figure 30). Orlando's head is turned over his left shoulder, possibly looking out at Astolfo and his hippogriff, who occupy the upper left corner of the panel. Beneath Astolfo and Orlando we see Angelica and Medoro, passionately embracing in the entrance to a cave. The left side of the scene contains an image of a distant Moorish city, and on the right side we see a group of soldiers and a man standing alone beneath them.

Like the overall composition of the *Mito di Ferrara* cycle, the *Orlando furioso* panel contains elements that reference the Schifanoia frescoes of Renaissance Ferrara. First of all, Funi's image of the lovers Angelica and Medoro in a cave (Figure 31) may have been inspired by a similar scene in the upper band of the September panel in the Sala dei Mesi (Figure 33). This scene depicts the *Triumph of Vulcan*, and we see the lovers Mars and Ylia embracing in front of a rocky arched structure, much like the one behind Angelica and Medoro. The mountain that Orlando climbs also resembles the barren rocky background of the *Triumph of Vulcan*, and the broken tree that he grabs looks as if it were lifted right out of this September scene.⁵⁶ In Funi's *Orlando furioso*, Medoro's right foot appears to extend out of the composition, creating a

⁵⁵ Mario Pazzaglia, *Antologia Della Letteratura Italiana, Volume 1: dalle origini alla fine del cinquecento* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1972), RI 42.

⁵⁶ Weber, *Achille Funi*, 54.

trompe l'oeil effect that breaks the boundary between the fresco's two-dimensionality and the viewer's three-dimensional space. A similar technique is used in the lower band of the April panel in the Sala dei Mesi; a man holding a bird appears as if he is sitting on the edge of the fresco, with his legs dangling over the painted marble beneath him (Figure 32).

Similarly, the image of Astolfo on the hippogriff (Figure 34) calls to mind the many depictions of horses in the Sala dei Mesi. (The legendary hippogriff was supposedly the offspring of a horse and a griffin, or a creature with the body of a lion and the wings and head of an eagle.) Funi painted his hippogriff in profile view, so we can clearly see its wings, lion claws, and its horse-like rear half. The lifelike horse legs, tail, and back resemble those of the many detailed horses in the Sala dei Mesi, which are often more realistic than the men who ride them (Figure 35).

While grounding the *Orlando furioso* panel in Ferrara's cultural history, the image of Astolfo on a hippogriff also situates Funi's frescoes in the Fascist context in which they were created. The hippogriff was a character that Balbo particularly liked, probably because of the link between its ability to fly and his own fame as an aviator.⁵⁷ In 1928 Balbo had inaugurated a series of symposia related to Ferrara's celebration of Ariosto with a speech entitled "Il volo d'Astolfo" ("The Flight of Astolfo"), in which he referenced both Astolfo's journey to the moon, as well as his own heroic flights.⁵⁸ Balbo had been transferred from minister of aviation to governor general of Libya in 1933 (possibly because Mussolini felt threatened by his growing fame and power), but he was still remembered for his accomplishments in aviation.⁵⁹ While the horse-like elements of Funi's hippogriff may be drawn from the Schifanoia frescoes, the creature serves as a symbolic reminder of Balbo's role as a Fascist aviator.

⁵⁷ Scardino, *Achille Funi*, 29.

⁵⁸ Segre, *Italo Balbo*, 125.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 277.

The figure in the bottom right of the *Orlando Furioso* panel provides another connection to 1930s Ferrara. According to Lucio Scardino's 1985 essay "Un artista ferrarese alla ricerca di Miti," this figure is a self-portrait of Funi, and may also represent the storyteller of the fresco cycle.⁶⁰ His position next to the entryway to the Sala dell'Arengo supports this conclusion; he stands alone, ready to welcome visitors into the room and tell them the grand myths of Ferrara's past. By dressing his self-portrait as a paladin instead of in modern clothing, Funi places himself in the legendary world he depicts. Furthermore, he suggests a connection between his own work and that of Ariosto and Ferrara's other Renaissance artists and intellectuals. This link between present and past is similar to the ways in which Mussolini attempted to connect himself to Roman emperors and Renaissance princes. Additionally, the themes of adventure, violence, pride, and loyalty that are present in Ariosto's story may also connect this panel to the Fascist context in which it was painted.

The four nude male figures on the shorter walls of the Sala dell'Arengo create yet another connection between Italian Renaissance art and Fascist ideology. Funi painted the four ancient gods standing on pedestals as if they were statues, with sturdy frames and defined muscles. The figures' contrapposto poses further emphasize this statuary quality; they stand with their weight shifted onto one leg, as do the figures in many Greek sculptures.

Through the study of Greek and Roman sculpture, classical ideals of beauty were revived during the Renaissance, and artists such as Michelangelo and Donatello modeled their representations of the male body off of classical statues. In the Sala dei Mesi this interest in the idealized human body can be seen in the representations of the signs of the zodiac in the central band of the months, specifically in the figure on the right in the month of April, who represents Taurus (Figure 37). Funi's *Mars* (Figure 36) stands in a pose very similar to that of this

⁶⁰ Scardino, *Achille Funi*, 28.

representation of Taurus; both figures stand in contrapposto with their weight on their left feet, causing their bodies to rotate slightly. Additionally, both figures hold symbolic objects in their hands, with their right arms raised above their left arms.

Funi's inclusion of these four nude males not only calls to mind the Renaissance interest in the human body, but also reflects the Fascist obsession with physical fitness and virility. Mussolini's concept of a "new Fascist man" also drew on classical sculpture as a model for a strong and beautiful body, which he associated with a disciplined mind.⁶¹ State-sponsored programs ensured organized physical activity for Italians of all ages and genders. *Il Libro dello Sport*, written in 1928 by Lando Ferretti, one of Mussolini's close advisors, traces the evolution of physical education from Greek and Roman antiquity through the Renaissance, ultimately connecting this history to Fascist policies and programs. The Fascist regime focused specifically on the physical education of the younger generations through youth organizations such as the Opera Nazionale Balilla, as well as university student groups.⁶² Ferretti writes: "To educate the Italian youth in a Fascist way, that is, in a virile way: this is one of the fundamental tasks of the Regime, whose urgency and beauty is felt by all."⁶³ Mussolini himself was the model for this strong modern man; he carefully controlled his representations in the media so as to always appear healthy and virile. Funi's four male nudes represent classical heroes, depicted similarly to how they were represented in Renaissance painting and sculpture; however, these figures take on an additional meaning when analyzed in the context of 1930s Fascist ideology.

⁶¹ George L. Mosse, "Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism (Apr., 1996): 25.

⁶² Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, 170.

⁶³ "Educare fascisticamente, cioè virilmente, la gioventù italiana: ecco uno dei compiti fondamentali del Regime, la cui urgenza e la cui bellezza è da tutti sentita." Ferretti, Lando. *Il Libro dello Sport* (Roma: Libreria del littorio: 1928), 189.

Conclusion

Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* fresco cycle makes clear references to Italian Renaissance art, and also suggests a connection to the Fascist context in which it was created. Like Mussolini and his Fascist government, Funi drew on a highly idealized and manipulated version Italian history in order to establish a common cultural tradition with which all Italians could identify. Despite the similarities between Funi's artistic and social goals and those of the Fascist regime, we cannot know to what extent Funi agreed with the Fascist policies which surrounded him. In her essay "Forging a Visible Fascist Nation," Claudia Lazzaro suggests that "most artists and architects were neither fully distanced from Fascism nor totally compromised in the service of it."⁶⁴ Funi may have fit this description, but regardless of whether or not he felt a personal connection to Fascist ideology, he supported himself by taking commissions from Fascist officials. In celebrating Ferrara's legendary history through the use of Renaissance fresco styles, Funi brings the city's historical glory forward to the Fascist 1930s. Although Funi's work represents a local and not explicitly political revival of history, it complements the Fascist regime's larger use of the past as a means of national unification, and of public art as a medium for engaging and persuading the masses.

⁶⁴ Lazzaro, "Forging a Visible Fascist Nation," 14.

Chapter 3: Muralists' Manifestos and the Writing of Diego Rivera and Achille Funi

In the previous two chapters I have established Italian Renaissance art as a source of inspiration for Rivera's murals at the Ministry of Public Education and the Chapingo Chapel, as well as for Funi's fresco cycle in the Palazzo Comunale of Ferrara. In this chapter I will turn to textual sources to suggest additional similarities between Rivera and Funi, and the larger cultural movements in which these two artists participated. By analyzing the Mexican "Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores" (1923) and the Italian "Manifiesto della pittura murale" (1933), I hope to demonstrate that the Mexican muralists of the 1920s and the Italian muralists of the 1930s built on the didactic and collective quality of murals in an attempt to reinvent their nation's cultural identity through monumental public art. I will also examine an additional article written by Rivera in the 1920s and one written by Funi in the 1930s, in order better understand the intentions behind the two artists' murals, and the sources from which they claimed to have drawn inspiration.¹

Muralist Manifestos

The "Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores" ("Manifiesto of the Syndicate of Mexican Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors") was written on December 9th, 1923, and was published the following June in the Syndicate's periodical, *El Machete*, which later became the mouthpiece of the Mexican Communist Party.² The Syndicate itself was formed in Mexico City in September of 1923, with David Alfaro Siqueiros as its Secretary General.³

Siqueiros had returned from Europe in 1922, where, according to some sources, he had already

¹ All translations of manifestos and articles are my own; other translations consulted for reference are listed in the bibliography, and original documents can be found in the appendix.

² Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 55.

³ Alejandro Anreus, "Primary Texts," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, edited by Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, and Robin Adèle Greeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), .319.

met Rivera.⁴ Although Siqueiros was responsible for writing the Syndicate's manifesto, it was also signed by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Xavier Guerrero, Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Germán Cueto, Carlos Mérida, and Fermín Revueltas. All of the signatories were artists, and many of them had recently created murals (or were still completing murals) at National Preparatory School (NPS), under the patronage of José Vasconcelos; by the time of the publication of the Syndicate's manifesto, the students at the NPS had already begun to show their distaste for the school's new decorations.⁵ Although the manifesto was written in direct response to Adolfo de la Huerta's attempted coup against President Alvaro Obregón's government, it could also be read as a defense of a stylistically, thematically, and ideologically diverse group of early murals.⁶ Throughout the manifesto the Syndicate expresses its support for the candidacy of Plutarco Elías Calles for president of Mexico, but this political goal is closely tied to a desire for social and aesthetic change.

The "Manifesto della pittura murale" ("Manifesto of Muralism") was published in December of 1933, almost exactly ten years after Siqueiros wrote the Mexican Syndicate's manifesto. Composed by Mario Sironi, the leader of the Italian mural movement, the manifesto was also signed by Achille Funi, Massimo Campigli, and Carlo Carrà. All four of these Italian artists had created murals for the controversial V Triennale of Milan, which had opened in May of 1933. Their manifesto was published in the first edition of *La Colonna*, a Milanese magazine run by Alberto Savinio, the Italian writer, painter, musician, and younger brother of artist Giorgio de Chirico.⁷ Savinio was one of the many artists invited by Sironi to create murals for

⁴ Helms, "Diego Rivera (1886-1957): A Chronology of His Art, Life, and Times," in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, (New York: Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1986), 47.

⁵ Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 113.

⁶ Alejandro Anreus, "Los Tres Grandes: Ideologies and Styles," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, edited by Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, and Robin Adèle Greeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 37

⁷ Rosita Tordi Castria, "Savinio e la Rivista Colonna," *Rivista delle letteratura italiana* XXIII (2005): 347.

the 1933 Triennale, so it is unsurprising that he would have supported the publication of an article in defense of muralism.⁸ The “Manifesto della pittura murale” was not the first text published on Italian muralism in the 1930s, nor was it the first response to the harsh criticism of the Triennale; both Carrà and Sironi had published articles in defense of the Triennale during the summer of 1933.⁹

Before discussing the content of the two manifestos, a consideration of the authors’ intended audiences provides insight into the historical context in which these two texts were written, as well as the goals that the artists hoped to accomplish through writing. In his book *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940: Art of the New Order*, Leonard Folgarait cites Thomas Crow’s distinction between the “public” and the “audience” of a work of art.¹⁰ Although Crow and Folgarait employ this distinction in relation to artwork, it can also help us understand the intentions behind these two written manifestos. According to Crow and Folgarait, the “public” refers to the group of viewers by whom the artist intends his work to be seen and experienced. An artist may create a work of art with a particular idealized public in mind, but we cannot assume that this public actually ever comes in contact with the work. On the other hand, the “audience” is made up of the individuals who do see the work of art, regardless of whether or not they have any awareness of or investment in what they are seeing.

The Mexican Syndicate’s manifesto begins with a dedication “To the Indigenous race humiliated throughout the centuries; to the soldiers converted into hangmen by their leaders; to the workers and peasants devastated by the greed of the rich; to the intellectuals who are not

⁸ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Flash Memories,” in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, ed. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 2005), 233.

⁹ Vittorio Fagone et al., *Muri ai pittori: Pittura murale e decorazione in Italia, 1930-1950* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1999), 13.

¹⁰ Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico*, 28.

corrupted by the bourgeoisie.”¹¹ While the Syndicate rhetorically addresses their manifesto to the indigenous working class, their true public is the final group invoked in this dedication, described later in the manifesto as “the revolutionary intellectuals of Mexico.”¹² Through their manifesto (as well as their artwork), the signatories hope to rally these revolutionary intellectuals around Obregón and his cultural projects, including muralism. Since the indigenous and working class masses may not have had ready access to the murals already completed or been ideologically or intellectually capable of understanding the content of the manifesto or of the signatories’ murals, the Syndicate set out to persuade the bourgeoisie to accept the new cultural and political order. The manifesto was published in the midst of the harsh criticism in response to the experimental murals at the NPS, including Rivera’s *Creation*, which had been inaugurated in March 1923. An editorial published in *El Demócrata* in July of 1923 resented “the dead loss in these [NPS] works of much that is good, of much intelligence and much effort.”¹³ Taking into consideration this criticism, and the active role that many of the manifesto’s signatories had played in the decoration of the NPS, the manifesto can be read as a defense of the Syndicate’s political and artistic views, and an attempt to spread these views to other members of the Mexican avant-garde.

Similarly, the authors of the Italian “Manifiesto della pittura murale” do not explicitly state their reasons for composing a manifesto, but it is likely that this text was written in response to the criticism of the artists’ murals at the 1933 Milan Triennale.¹⁴ Sironi had been responsible for granting commissions for the Triennale decorations; in addition to the future signatories of

¹¹ David Alfaro Siqueiros et al., “Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos Pintores y Escultores,” (Mexico City: Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, 1923), ICAA Documents (751080).

“A la raza indígena humillada durante siglos; a los soldados convertidos en verdugos por los pretorianos; a los obreros y campesinos azotados por la avaricia de los ricos; a los intelectuales que no estén envilecidos por la burguesía.”

¹² “Hacemos un llamamiento general a los intelectuales revolucionarios de México...”

¹³ Charlot, *A Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 149.

¹⁴ Mario Sironi and Andrea Sironi, *Sironi: La grande decorazione*. (Milano: Electa, 2004), 28.

the manifesto, over thirty artists created murals for Milan's new Palazzo dell'Arte around the general Fascist themes of "work, sport, study, and family life."¹⁵

While moderates such as the architect Gio Ponti and the art critic and patron Margherita Sarfatti supported the Triennale for its experimental nature, members of both more progressive and more reactionary groups criticized the diversity of the murals' subject matters and styles, as well as the technical problems resulting from the artists' use of modern industrial chemicals instead of the traditional fresco medium.¹⁶ Some of the most critical responses to the Triennale came from Ugo Ojetti, an influential journalist and art critic who promoted the didactic and social role of art through his work with *Dedalo* art magazine. Ojetti reported: "The Triennale has decorated the staircase and *saloni* with bas-reliefs and frescoes (not real ones but ones that strive for the appearance of them)... Officials have had to reassure the Milanese that these would be destroyed as soon as the Triennale was over!"¹⁷ Furthermore, Ojetti objected to the unfinished quality of Sironi's contributions to the exhibition.¹⁸

Virginio Ghiringhelli, a painter, critic, and director of the Galleria dei Milione in Milan, highlighted the Triennale's main problems in an article published in the June 1933 edition of the magazine *Quadrante*. He stated that the Triennale "did not surpass the merit of an experimental attempt," and lamented that the "experiment was spoiled from a technical point of view, as the conditions of the paintings are truly pitiful."¹⁹ He criticized Funi specifically for attempting to "lead us backwards, into an academicism that has cost Italy a few centuries of delay in European

¹⁵ Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 171.

¹⁶ Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 173.

¹⁷ Quoted in English in Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 43.

¹⁸ Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 176.

¹⁹ "Ma dobbiamo subito affermare che il risultato non ha superato il valore di un tentativo sperimentale," "L'esperimento è poi sciupato dal punto di vista tecnico in quanto le condizioni delle pitture sono veramente pietose..." Virgilio Ghiringhelli, "Pitture murali nel palazzo della Triennale," *Quadrante* (1933), reproduced in Rossana Bossaglia, *Il "Novecento italiano": storia, documenti, iconografia* (Feltrinelli, 1979), 157-58.

painting.”²⁰ Ghiringhelli also critiqued the stylistic dissonance of the frescoes, the congestion of the rooms, and the lack of collaboration between painters and architects. This criticism is unsurprising, as Ghiringhelli promoted abstract art and rationalism, and had personal experience collaborating with architects and other rationalist designers.

It is likely that Sironi, Funi, Campigli, and Carrà would have felt the need to defend themselves and their art against these critiques, so we can assume that these critical journalists and artists probably made up the manifesto’s intended public. As the symbolic end point of a discussion on muralism that had begun with Sironi’s publication of “Pittura murale” in January of 1932, the “Manifesto della pittura murale” would have given these four artists a final opportunity to explain and defend the conceptual grounding of their Triennale murals.²¹ Based on its contributors and readers, *La Colonna* was a logical venue for reaching the Triennale’s critics. In addition to the “Manifesto della pittura murale,” in its two years of existence *La Colonna* published articles about architecture, poetry, and painting, with a particular focus on Savinio’s greatest interest: urban architecture. Since the magazine’s most regular collaborators were art critics (Raffaele Carrieri and Giorgio Castelfranco), it would have attracted readers with an interest in art criticism and current artistic events.²² We cannot know which individuals actually read the “Manifesto delle pittura murale”; however, the date and venue of its publication suggest that like the Mexican Syndicate, the Italian muralists hoped their manifesto would persuade members of the intellectual and artistic community to join their social and aesthetic cause.

In addition to the parallels between the intended publics of the Mexican and Italian manifestos, the signatories of the two documents express similar social and aesthetic reasons for

²⁰ Virgilio Ghiringhelli, “Pitture murali nel palazzo della Triennale,” 157-8.

²¹ Vittorio Fagone et al., *Muri ai pittori*, 33.

²² Tordi Castria, “Savinio e la rivista Colonna,” 350.

supporting muralism. Written in a moment of political uncertainty and change, both manifestos reflect their authors' attempt to find a new mode of artistic expression, capable of unifying diverse populations under a common identity. By the time of the publication of the Syndicate's manifesto, the Mexican Revolution had officially ended, but as evident in the coup that provoked the creation of the manifesto, the political violence persisted. The Syndicate therefore continued to uphold revolutionary ideals, in an attempt to rally intellectuals to their political and artistic cause, and to celebrate indigenous and popular art for its potential to shape the new nation's cultural and political identity. Italian politicians and intellectuals during the Fascist era also emphasized the need for a unifying national identity to bridge the country's regional differences. As discussed in Chapter 1, art under Fascism was characterized by a wide variety of styles and themes; by attempting to define a "Fascist Art," the authors of the "Manifesto della pittura murale" did not intend to impose a specific style on all Italian artists, but rather hoped muralism could serve as a common medium for cultural unification.

Within their respective societies, the authors of both manifestos position themselves on the threshold of social and aesthetic change. The Mexican Syndicate describes the current state of the country as a "moment of social transition between the destruction of an old order and the establishment of a new order," and charges this "old and cruel order" with the exploitation of Mexico's working class and indigenous populations.²³ According to the Syndicate, the destruction of this unjust and antiquated order would not only positively affect the social structure of Mexico, but would also have a great cultural significance: "The triumph of the popular classes will bring a flowering of ethnic art, of cosmological and historical significance to

²³ "Proclamamos que siendo nuestro momento social de transición entre el antiquilamiento de un orden envejecido y la implantación de un orden nuevo..." "un orden envejecido y cruel," "los explotadores del pueblo"

our race.”²⁴ In other words, the Syndicate members argue that social renewal would be accompanied by artistic transformation. Just as the authors of the manifesto hope to replace the dominance of the elite in old order with the ruling of the popular classes in the new order, they establish a clear contrast between the artistic production of the past and that of the future: “We reject the so-called easel painting and all of the ultra-intellectual art of the aristocracy, and we exalt the manifestations of monumental art.”²⁵ The members of the Syndicate connect their desired change in the Mexican social hierarchy to this departure from aristocratic art by declaring their cause to be a “social and aesthetic-educational struggle.”²⁶

The four signatories of the Italian manifesto also situate themselves on the forefront of change, emphasizing the need for a departure from existing artistic trends in order to create a “Fascist Art.” Unlike the members of the Mexican Syndicate, who clearly elaborate their revolutionary ideals, the Italian artists do not describe the details of their country’s political situation. Their manifesto confronts the issue of defining a “Fascist Art” or a “Fascist Style,” but they include little information about the political views that go along with the aesthetic changes that they promote.

The wording of the Italian muralists’ artistic descriptions shows a clear alignment with Fascist values. For example, the manifesto states that the mural technique itself requires “decisive and virile execution,” as well as “compositional order and rigor,” and the artists advocate for the “imposition of artistic discipline.”²⁷ The adjectives used to describe muralism call to mind the Fascist government’s obsession with strong bodies, virile education, and strict

²⁴ “el triunfo de las clases populares traerá consigo un florecimiento, no solamente en el orden social, sino un florecimiento unánime de arte étnica, cosmogónica e históricamente transcendental en la vida de nuestra raza...”

²⁵ “Repudiamos la pintura llamada de caballete y todo el arte de cenáculo ultraintelectual por aristocrático, y exaltamos las manifestaciones de arte monumental...”

²⁶ “la lucha social y estético-educativa que realizamos.”

²⁷ Mario Sironi et al., “Manifesto della pittura murale,” <http://www.francocenerelli.com/antologia/sironi.htm> “quella esecuzione decisa e virile, che la tecnica stessa della pittura murale richiede,” “l’ordinamento e il rigore della composizione,” “Noi crediamo che l’imposizione volontaria di una disciplina di mestire...”

discipline. Romy Golan suggests that this view of mural painting as “virile” and “decisive” would have contrasted with the artists’ belief that creating easel paintings for bourgeois homes was a feminized activity.²⁸ However, these references to Fascist ideology do not necessarily reveal much about the muralists’ political beliefs; artists working under the Fascist government had a relatively high degree of aesthetic freedom, but in order to receive government commissions they could not express antifascist sentiments.²⁹

Regardless of their personal opinions of Fascism, the authors of the Italian manifesto, like the Mexican Syndicate, hope to define a new artistic form and style to express their country’s changing political situation and cultural identity. Their manifesto states that “after years and years of technical exercises and of meticulous Nordic-inspired introspections of naturalistic phenomena, modern painting yearns for a higher spiritual synthesis.”³⁰ In attempting to define a “Fascist Art,” these artists reject “the research, experiments, and tests that were so prolific throughout the past century,” and whose effects “have unfortunately extended until our time.”³¹ These vague criticisms of contemporary and past artistic trends could refer to many modernist movements; Jeffrey T. Schnapp suggests that they may be allusions to Futurist painting and architectural Rationalism, two styles that Sironi had criticized in previous essays.³² In the place of these experimental trends, the manifesto suggests that modern art should reflect “the great eras of our past,” stating that “the style of Fascist Painting should be at once ancient and very new.”³³

²⁸ Golan, *Muralnomad*, 39.

²⁹ Claudia Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation,” in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 14.

³⁰ “La pittura moderna, dopo anni e anni di esercitazioni tecnicistiche e di minuziose introspezioni dei fenomeni naturalistici di origine nordica, sente oggi il bisogno di una sintesi spirituale superiore.”

³¹ “L’Arte Fascista rinnega le ricerche, gli esperimenti, gli assaggi di cui tanto prolifico è stato il secolo scorso. Rinnega soprattutto i ‘postumi’ di essi esperimenti, che malauguratamente si sono prolungati fino al nostro tempo.”

³² Schnapp, “Flash Memories,” 280, notes 30 and 32.

³³ “le affinità elettive con le grandi epoche del nostro passato...” “lo stile della Pittura Fascista dovrà essere antico e a un tempo novissimo...”

After expressing the need to create a new form of art to define the new political order of their respective countries, both the Mexican Syndicate and the Italian muralists arrive at monumental public art as the appropriate medium for creating a unifying national and cultural identity in a time of change. In each case, the muralists argue that monumental wall paintings, unlike easel paintings, have the power to persuasively convey didactic messages to a wide audience; this social function of murals would have been essential to the artists' desire to shape their nations' identity. The Mexican Syndicate instructs artists to create art that can act as "ideological propaganda for the good of the people, making art...have the purpose of beauty for everyone, of education and of combat."³⁴ In this passage the signatories are not explicit about the style or medium of this new art; however, we can infer that based on their desire for art to serve as propaganda and inspire education and combat, they probably imagined a relatively simple and clear style, which would be legible to members of the uneducated working class. The Syndicate therefore supports "the manifestations of monumental art because this art is of public utility."³⁵ Unlike easel paintings designed to hang on the walls of elite museums and domestic interiors, murals could be painted in public places, where the Syndicate hoped they would reach both the bourgeoisie that made up the manifesto's public, as well as the Mexican masses.

The Italian manifesto's four signatories also promote muralism for its capacity to reach a wide audience and define a common national identity; they declare that "from muralism will arise the 'Fascist Style,' with which the new civilization will be able to identify."³⁶ Like the Mexican Syndicate, the Italian artists emphasize the didactic role of art: "In the Fascist State art

³⁴ "los creadores de belleza deben esforzarse porque su labor presente un aspecto claro de propaganda ideológica en bien del pueblo, haciendo del arte...una finalidad de belleza para todos, de educación y de combate."

³⁵ "...exaltamos las manifestaciones de arte monumental por ser de utilidad pública."

³⁶ "Dalla pittura murale sorgerà lo 'Stile Fascista', nel quale la nuova civiltà si potrà identificare."

comes to have an educational function. It should produce the ethics of our time.”³⁷ The manifesto highlights the persuasive quality of muralism in particular, which they describe as “social painting par excellence,” because “it operates on the people’s imagination more directly than any other form of painting.”³⁸ While the Mexican Syndicate broadly describes the “public utility” of monumental art, the Italian manifesto provides a more detailed explanation of the “practical destination of murals,” giving the example of “public buildings” and “places that have a civic function.”³⁹

In addition to the didactic and persuasive potential of public art, the Italian artists cite their murals as a continuation of “our predominantly decorative, moralistic and stylistic traditions.”⁴⁰ They argue that “the spirituality of the early Renaissance is closer to us than the splendor of the great Venetians” and the “art of pagan and Christian Rome is closer to us than that of ancient Greece.”⁴¹ This historical preference, in particular the use of the term “spirituality,” may suggest the muralists’ desire to increase the persuasive power of murals by engaging audiences on an emotional or psychological level, rather than just temporarily attracting their attention with a demonstration of “splendor.” The persuasive power of murals, as well as their accessibility to the public, made them an appealing medium not only to artists, but also to the Fascist government. Like radio, television, and cinema, public art played an important role in the Fascist government’s propaganda campaign. Although the artists who contributed to exhibitions like the Triennale enjoyed a large degree of aesthetic freedom, theme competitions were an important element of Fascist official culture, and served to spread Fascist ideology; at

³⁷ “Nello Stato Fascista l’arte viene ad avere una funzione educatrice. Essa deve produrre l’etica del nostro tempo.”

³⁸ “La pittura murale è pittura sociale per eccellenza. Essa opera sull’immaginazione popolare più direttamente di qualunque altra forma di pittura.”

³⁹ “...la pratica destinazione della pittura murale (edifici pubblici, luoghi comunque che hanno una civica funzione)...”

⁴⁰ “Le nostre grandi tradizioni di carattere prevalentemente decorativo, murale e stilistico...”

⁴¹ “La spiritualità del primo Rinascimento ci è più vicina del fasto dei grandi Veneziani. L’arte di Roma pagana e cristiana ci è più vicina di quella greca.”

the 1930 Venice Biennale prizes were awarded to artists for works such as a statue “that exalts the physical and spiritual vigor of the race” or “a painting inspired by a person or event from the founding of the *fasci di combattimento*.”⁴²

In addition to emphasizing the didactic and persuasive function of muralism, both the Mexican and Italian manifestos highlight the importance of collectivity over individualism in art. The Syndicate’s manifesto declares that the art of the Mexican people is the “greatest and healthiest spiritual manifestation of the world...because it is of the people, and therefore collective.”⁴³ In order to preserve the collective nature of indigenous art, the manifesto calls for the “absolute disappearance of bourgeois individualism.”⁴⁴ By inviting the “revolutionary peasants, workers and soldiers of Mexico” to form “a united front to combat the common enemy,” the members of the Syndicate attempt to create a collective social group that would include both artists and members of the working class.⁴⁵ Not only do the authors of the manifesto attempt to express the needs of the working class, but they also claim to be a part of this social group; by wearing overalls and calling their group a *sindacato*, they promote the idea of artists as workers.

The Italian manifesto opposes individuality in favor of collectivity, stating that each artist should “renounce the egocentricity that renders his spirit infertile” in order to become “an artist who serves a moral idea, and subordinates his own individuality to the collective work.”⁴⁶ In other words, the Italian muralists urge artists to give up their individual prestige and style in order to create artwork capable of speaking to a broader audience. Similar to the Mexican

⁴² Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 79.

⁴³ “el arte del pueblo de México es la manifestación espiritual más grande y más sana del mundo...porque siendo popular es colectiva”

⁴⁴ “teniendo hacia la desaparición absoluta del individualismo por burgués.”

⁴⁵ “Hacemos un llamamiento urgente a todos los campesinos, obreros y soldados revolucionarios de México para que...formemos un frente único para combatir al enemigo común.”

⁴⁶ “L’artista deve rinunciare a quell’egocentrismo che, ormai, non potrebbe che isterilire il suo spirito, e diventare...un artista che serve un’idea morale, e subordina la propria individualità all’opera collettiva.”

Syndicate's association with the working classes, the Italian muralists "firmly believe that the artist should return to being an ordinary man among men."⁴⁷ The interest of both the Mexican Syndicate and the Italian muralists in creating art for the people is complicated by their appreciation for the persuasive and propagandistic power of murals. If these artists' murals were truly collective expressions of the larger society out of which they emerged, they would reflect the ideological and artistic values of the working classes. On the contrary, murals served more as a means for the artist to persuade the public with his own ideological values.

Although both manifestos discuss collectivity in relation to artists and artistic production, the concept of collectivity also applies to the creation of a unifying national identity, a challenge that both Mexico and Italy faced at the time in which the manifestos were written. From the perspective of Obregón's government, muralism was a means through which to allow the working class masses to feel included in the nationalistic rhetoric that was being promoted by the government.⁴⁸ The revolutionary intelligentsia and particularly visual artists like the members of the Syndicate embraced popular art both as a symbol of Mexican cultural pride and identity and as a repudiation of bourgeois taste, which was still dominated by a preference for art derived from the academic tradition.⁴⁹

Similarly, the Fascist government's glorification and appropriation of Italy's Roman and Renaissance history served to form a collective memory upon which to build a stronger national identity. All members of society were expected to subordinate their individuality to the collective cause of Fascism, and contribute to the functioning of the State; while soldiers contributed their strength and heroism, artists' contribution came in the form of participation in state-sponsored

⁴⁷ "Noi crediamo fermamente che l'artista deve ritornare a essere uomo tra gli uomini..."

⁴⁸ Robin Adèle Greeley, "Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920-1970," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, ed. Alejandro Anreus et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 18.

⁴⁹ Rick A López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Duke University Press Books, 2010), 4.

commissions and exhibitions.⁵⁰ Mussolini himself echoed the manifesto's assertions about collectivity, stating that "through the abnegation of self and the sacrifice of personal interests," the individual "achieves that purely spiritual existence which affirms his value as a man."⁵¹

While the "Manifesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores" invokes the indigenous and working classes as the national ideal and urges intellectuals to reject bourgeois values and the "Manifesto della pittura murale" responds to the critiques of intellectual members of Fascist Italy's artistic community, the authors of the two manifestos champion muralism in similar ways and to similar ends. The signatories agree on muralism as the most effective way to establish a common cultural identity and unite the diverse members of their changing societies. Since these manifestos express the views of larger groups of artists, it is helpful to examine texts written individually by Rivera and Funi in order to better understand their specific contributions to cultural nationalism.

Rivera: Pulquerías and Popular Art

Whereas an examination of the Mexican "Manifesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores" and the Italian "Manifesto della pittura murale" highlighted the similarities between the goals of the Mexican Syndicate and those of the Italian muralists, additional texts written by Rivera and Funi help clarify the individual ideals that may have shaped their murals. In "Mexican Painting: Pulquerías" (1926), Rivera expands on the theme of popular art as the essence of Mexican culture. In his murals at the Ministry of Public Education Rivera adapts lessons from Italian Renaissance painting to engage viewers in a celebration of the popular art and culture that he praises in "Pulquerías." In "Rientriamo nella storia" ("Let Us Reenter History," 1934), Funi examines the importance of Italian artistic tradition in shaping

⁵⁰ Stone, *The Patron State*, 27.

⁵¹ Mussolini, quoted in Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 163.

modern art, echoing his manifesto's call for a departure from the recent past and its attempt to associate modern art with the artistic tradition of the Italian Renaissance. Funi's *Mito di Ferrara* fresco cycle clearly reflects the ideals that emerge out of his writing.

Rivera's "Mexican Painting: Pulquerías" was published as the third in a series of articles that Rivera wrote about Mexican popular art for *Mexican Folkways* in 1926. Created and edited by Frances Toor, an anthropologist from the United States, *Mexican Folkways* was a magazine published in English and Spanish from 1925 to 1937. Through the contributions of Mexican as well as foreign artists, anthropologists, educators, writers, and journalists, *Mexican Folkways* celebrated Mexico's indigenous cultures, popular traditions, and folk art.⁵² In "Pulquerías," Rivera describes the paintings that decorate the walls of the bars that serve *pulque*, a mildly alcoholic beverage dating to pre-conquest times that was made from the fermented sap of the maguey cactus. The article praises pulquería paintings as examples of popular art, relevant and accessible to the Mexican people.

This article on pulquería painting was published along with another brief essay by Rivera, entitled "Names of Pulquerías." In this second article, Rivera records the ironic and often vulgar names of pulquerías, describing these titles as "the best synthetic Mexican poems."⁵³ The two essays are accompanied by photos of the exteriors of pulquerías, as well as an illustration signed by Rivera (Figure 38). While the photos portray facades painted with images of bullfighting, peasant families, and other popular scenes, Rivera's illustration depicts an ornately-dressed woman seated on a maguey cactus with her knees apart, holding a church and surrounded by four kneeling figures. These four figures appear to be praying to the center female figure on the

⁵² This magazine was just one of many attempts to revalue popular art in post-Revolutionary Mexico. For more examples, see Rick A López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Duke University Press Books, 2010).

⁵³ "...sus nombres constituyen los mejores poemas sintéticos mexicanos."

cactus, and represent the clergy, the middle class, and the indigenous population. This humorous and satirical illustration adds to Rivera's discussion of the ironic decorations and names associated with pulquerías, and the power of popular culture in unifying members of diverse social classes.⁵⁴

Although "Pulquerías" is not an explicitly political text, in this article Rivera returns to the Syndicate's distinction between the oppressive old order of the past and the empowering new order of the future, praising the interior and exterior decorations of pulquerías as a "demonstration, or better yet, an anticipation of the style of the *art of the new order*."⁵⁵ Not only are these paintings created by members of the working class, but they also depict scenes related to Mexican popular culture.

According to Rivera, pulquería painting is a "complete art," because it combines "many different elements within a perfectly harmonious whole."⁵⁶ He cites color as one of the essential elements of pulquería painting, and of Mexican culture in general, stating that "the Mexican is, eminently and above all else, a colorist."⁵⁷ Rivera compares the colorful pulquería paintings to the flowers, prints, and food that decorate the interior of old adobe houses, coming together to form an altar "to the religion of color."⁵⁸ Through this comparison, he associates pulquería painting with an even more basic and authentic expression of Mexican popular culture: the domestic decorations of the working classes, both urban and rural. In addition to their colorful

⁵⁴ As the magazine's art editor, Rivera also designed the cover for the issue of *Mexican Folkways* in which this article appeared (Figure 39). Although the image does not directly illustrate Rivera's article, it similarly celebrates the artistic tradition of the Mexican people. The illustration depicts an idealized image of a peasant holding a sickle and worker holding a hammer, standing on either side of a snake biting a stalk of wheat. The simplified and enlarged features of the worker's and the peasant's faces call to mind depictions of human faces in pre-Columbian masks, as well as the sculpture of Mardonio Magaña, a self-taught, working-class artist "discovered" by Rivera.

⁵⁵ Diego Rivera, "Mexican Painting: Pulquerías / La pintura de las pulquerías," *Mexican Folkways* Vol. 2, No. 7 (June-July 1926): 6-15, ICAA Documents (734208)

"Esto es una demostración, o más bien dicho un anticipo sobre las modalidades *del arte del orden nuevo*..."

⁵⁶ "La pintura de pulquerías es un arte completo: el de decorar una fachada y un interior, combinando muchos elementos diferentes dentro de un todo perfectamente armónico."

⁵⁷ "...el mexicano es, eminentemente y antes que nada, un colorista."

⁵⁸ "...todo ello constituyendo una especie de altar que atestiguaba la religión del color."

nature, Rivera praises pulquería paintings for their ability to represent scenes from the everyday life of the Mexican people. He describes the sometimes tragic quality of these scenes, which “as in popular everyday life, is always mixed with the intense and profound irony...that is found invariably in the depth of the spirit of the Mexican people.”⁵⁹

Rivera’s praise for pulquería painting also includes a discussion of the conflicting interests of the popular classes and the bourgeoisie, a central theme of the Syndicate’s 1923 manifesto. While Rivera considers pulquería painting to be “one of the most important manifestations of Mexican painting,” to the bourgeoisie this art form is “one of the main ‘embarrassments of Mexico.’”⁶⁰ Rivera recalls how the bourgeoisie attempted to do away with pulquería painting entirely during the reign of Porfirio Díaz, and how “only the ‘Revolution,’ begun in 1910, came to save this genuine painting.”⁶¹ According to Rivera, even the Revolution could not put an end to the bourgeoisie’s control over the people’s cultural expression; he writes that “all the educational organisms controlled by the bourgeoisie come together to impose the bourgeois taste on the proletarian masses,” and churches and pulquerías are the “only places that the bourgeoisie has left in full possession of the people.”⁶² Despite the continuous bourgeois attacks on pulquerías and their decorations, Rivera sees hope for the future of popular art; he predicts that if the pulquerías were to close, “proletarian painting would be done on the walls of public buildings, so that...the people would really make public buildings their own.”⁶³

⁵⁹ “...como en la vida popular de cada día ésta se mezcla siempre con la aguda y profunda ironía que...se encuentra invariablemente en el fondo del espíritu de la gente mexicana...”

⁶⁰ “Una de las manifestaciones más importantes de la pintura mexicana...es la decoración de fachadas e interiores de pulquerías y figones,” “Naturalmente que para la burguesía nacional...esta pintura de las pulquerías constituye una de las principales ‘vergüenzas de México.’”

⁶¹ “...solo la ‘Revolución,’ empezada en 1910, vino a salvar esta pintura genuina...”

⁶² “Todos los organismos educacionales controlados por la burguesía...concurren para imponer a la masa proletaria el gusto burgués...” “Tal es el caso de ciertas iglesias y de todas las pulquerías, únicos lugares que la burguesía ha dejado en plena posesión del pueblo...”

⁶³ “...la pintura proletaria se haría sobre los muros de los edificios públicos, porque...el pueblo haría realmente suyos los edificios públicos.”

In this last prediction Rivera alludes to his own murals, which he sees as extensions of the popular art that he praises throughout his article. By the time “Pulquerías” was published in 1926, Rivera had completed his decoration of the first two floors of both courtyards at the Ministry of Public Education, and he was just beginning his mural cycle in the Chapingo chapel. At first glance, the fresco panel *Urban Day of the Dead* (1923-24, Figure 14), painted on the first floor of the Court of Fiestas at the Ministry of Public Education, seems to illustrate the ways in which Rivera drew inspiration from popular art forms, such as the paintings he praises in “Pulquerías.” This panel depicts a crowded street in which members of various social classes join in the celebration of the traditional Mexican holiday, the Day of the Dead. As discussed in Chapter 1, the huge *calaveras* that stand behind the crowds allude to the work of the popular artist, José Guadalupe Posada; by referencing Posada’s engravings, Rivera attempts to associate himself and his murals with the tradition of Mexican popular culture.

Rivera’s depiction of the crowded celebration further demonstrates his desire to connect himself and his viewers to this quintessentially Mexican tradition. He overwhelms the viewer with detailed images of men and women drinking pulque and buying tacos, and children holding sugar skulls typical of the festivities, all of whom push their way through the crowd; by including many realistic elements in this urban celebration, Rivera attempts to create an image that would be both appealing to his intellectual peers and yet also relevant and accessible to the working class. His inclusion of a self-portrait with his wife Guadalupe Marín suggests Rivera’s attempt to persuade the viewer that he is himself a man of the people, and would easily fit in with this kind of popular celebration. While some of the figures in Rivera’s crowded scene vanish into the background of the composition, others extend far into the foreground, almost appearing to invade the space of the spectator. Rivera depicts the four female figures on the front edge of the

crowd with their backs to the viewer; in addition to their close proximity to the spectator, these figures' turned backs mimic the position in which a viewer would stand in front of the fresco. Rivera uses this technique to draw the spectator into the scene, causing her to feel as though she is also a participant in this celebration of popular culture.

By alluding to Posada and placing himself and the viewer in the midst of this festival scene, Rivera grounds his *Urban Day of the Dead* panel in popular culture, encouraging us to participate in the ritual. Just as the Syndicate had attempted to align itself with the working class in its manifesto, Rivera hopes to portray himself as a man of the people. However, the compositional structure of the panel complicates this intention; as discussed in Chapter 1, Rivera's manipulation of optical scale in *Urban Day of the Dead* clearly reflects the influence of the art that he viewed and sketched while in Italy. In this panel Rivera successfully brings these Italian lessons into dialogue with a local Mexican tradition.

The contrast between the popular subject matter of *Urban Day of the Dead* and the influence of Italian Renaissance art on the panel's composition demonstrates the ways in which Rivera was able to use his Western European artistic training in the service of the social and artistic ideals expressed in "Pulquerías." In his article in *Mexican Folkways*, Rivera suggests the popular paintings that decorate pulquerías as a source for his own murals, therefore distancing himself from the European wall painting tradition. However, the strong influence of Italian Renaissance art on the composition of *Urban Day of the Dead* shows that Rivera is clearly still drawing inspiration from European examples as well. In *Urban Day of the Dead* Rivera uses Renaissance-inspired techniques to actively engage the viewer in this monumental celebration, suggesting popular art and culture as the common ground on which to build a unifying national identity that would be relevant and accessible to Mexicans of all social classes.

Funi: Historical Revival with Contemporary Character

Funi's "Rientriamo nella storia" was published in the April 1934 edition of *La Colonna*, the same magazine in which the "Manifesto della pittura murale" had been published the previous December. In this article Funi advocates for a return to Italy's artistic history, but encourages artists to not abandon their contemporary identity through blind imitation of historical models.

Like the "Manifesto della pittura murale," Funi's article supports a departure from the recent "so-called figurative 'experiences'" in art.⁶⁴ Funi does not explicitly state which artistic movements he opposes, but his criticism of "elemental and symbolic expressions," "simplistic frameworks," and "the elegant and heavy delights of abstraction" suggests that he may be referencing the work of the abstract artists who showed at Ghiringhelli's Galleria del Milione and published in *Quadrante*.⁶⁵ Regardless of which artists these statements reference, Funi predicts that these trends will gradually disappear thanks to a "natural weariness and boredom," and he suggests that artists will make up for this disappearance by looking to the past.⁶⁶ He asks: "What will come now if not a return to our artistic civilization?" but also acknowledges that "for us" the idea of the past has had a "heavy and controversial meaning."⁶⁷ This statement alludes to the Futurists' repudiation of the past in favor of modern technology and city life. Funi himself had been an active participant in the Futurist movement, and had signed the 1920 manifesto "Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura" ("Against All Returns in Painting"), declaring that "the true

⁶⁴ Achille Funi, "Rientriamo nella storia," in Lucio Scardino, *Achille Funi e Il "Mito Di Ferrara,"* (Ferrara: Belriguardo, 1985), 52.

"le cosiddette 'esperienze' figurative"

⁶⁵ "espressioni elementari, e simboliche," "schemi simplistici," "le eleganti e pesanti voluttà d'astrazione,"

⁶⁶ "una naturale stanchezza e noia"

⁶⁷ "Che cosa verrà allora se non un richiamo alla nostra civiltà artistica?" "questa parola che ha avuto per noi un così grave significato polemico"

Italian tradition is that of not having had any tradition, since the Italian race is a race of innovators and creators.”⁶⁸

After referencing his previous aversion to the past, Funi goes on to discuss his more recent embrace of muralism. He describes how he has had the opportunity to “discuss the possibility of reclaiming...fresco painting,” and explains his “certainty that muralism can examine and consolidate our resources and experiences as modern painters.”⁶⁹ By acknowledging his own previous disregard for the past, followed by an explanation of his return to traditional fresco painting, Funi establishes himself as an example of an artist who has already followed the course he promotes throughout this essay.

While Funi believes that “the respectful commitment to traditional images...puts the painter up against the arduous truth and glory of painting,” he does not support the blind imitation of traditional forms.⁷⁰ He declares: “Of course I do not want to conclude that we should stifle the spirit of our pictorial personality,” and goes on to explain that he does not wish to “deny the color of our skies, of our water, the mixture of our light, the features of the contemporary figure” in order to imitate “distant representations.”⁷¹ These final comments clarify the specific conditions of Funi’s support for a return to history; he asks artists to draw inspiration from Italy’s artistic tradition, but not at the expense of the individual qualities that ground their work in the present era. Funi’s concluding passage contrasts with the idea of collectivity expressed in the “Manifesto della pittura murale.” Whereas the manifesto instructs

⁶⁸ “Noi dichiariamo invece che la vera tradizione italiana è quella di non aver avuto tradizione alcuna, giacchè la razza italiana è una razza di novatori e costruttori.” Maria Nezzo, “Fra avanguardia e ritorno all’ordine: Leonardo Dudreville e il movimentismo italiano dei primi anni Venti,” *Artibus et Historiae* Vol. 29, No. 57 (2008): 156.

⁶⁹ “...la mia certezza, che la pittura murale possa vagliare e consolidare le nostre forze ed esperienze di pittori moderni.”

⁷⁰ “...ho la persuasione più viva che l’obbligo rispettoso delle immagini tradizionali...ponga il pittore di fronte all’ardua verità e gloria del dipingere.”

⁷¹ “Non voglio certo concludere che si debba spegnere il tono della nostra personalità pittorica...” “Non si tratterà neppure di rinnegare il colore dei nostri cieli, delle nostre acque, l’impasto della nostra luce, il lineamento della figura contemporanea, e imitare...[le] lontane figurazioni.”

artists to renounce their individuality, Funi stresses that each artist should maintain the spirit of his unique personality.

Funi's call for a return to tradition in art is consistent with the themes and styles of the frescoes he created during this time period, in particular his *Mito di Ferrara* cycle. The publication of "Rientriamo nella storia" coincided with the beginning of his work on this cycle; the article was published approximately two months after Funi signed the first contract for his decoration of the Sala dell'Arengo.⁷² Although Funi had only just started to work on this cycle, the conditions of the contract demonstrate that the mythological and historical theme of his frescoes had already been determined. The first condition reads: "The walls will illustrate subjects drawn from Ferrara's myths and stories, based on sketches which have to a great extent already been presented."⁷³

Funi's decoration of the ceiling of the Sala dell'Arengo (Figure 40) exemplifies his desire to return to Italy's artistic tradition while maintaining his identity as a twentieth-century painter. The fresco that covers the ceiling of this room depicts a trompe l'oeil balcony, surrounded by images of the signs of the zodiac. Female figures in modern dress lean on the balcony railing and gaze down at the room below, and trompe l'oeil columns shown in an unrealistic perspective extend from the balcony to support an arbor ceiling.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the zodiac figures that form a border for the balcony scene were likely inspired by the signs of the zodiac on the walls of the *Sala dei Mesi* at the Palazzo Schifanoia. The ceiling of the *Sala dei Mesi* is not decorated with fresco, so it is unlikely that Funi had the Palazzo Schifanoia in mind when designing the rest of his ceiling; however, there are multiple examples of similar trompe-l'oeil ceilings in other Renaissance palaces in

⁷² The contract is dated February 23rd, 1934, reprinted in Scardino, *Achille Funi e Il "Mito Di Ferrara,"* 50.

⁷³ "Nelle pareti verranno svolti soggetti tratti dai miti e dalle storie Ferraresi, secondo bozzetti, in gran parte già presentati..." Scardino, *Achille Funi e Il "Mito Di Ferrara,"* 50.

Ferrara. Funi's female figures and balcony may have been inspired by the ceiling of the Sala del Tesoro in the Palazzo Costabili (also called Palazzo di Ludovico il Moro), located just a few blocks away from the Palazzo Schifanoia (Figure 41).⁷⁴ Painted by the Ferrara artist Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo around 1508, this ceiling depicts a balcony scene in which elegantly-dressed figures, holding musical instruments and surrounded by animals, look down over the railing at the room below.⁷⁵ Funi's balcony and female figures suggest they were inspired by this decoration of the Sala del Tesoro ceiling, with the exception of the open sky above Garofalo's scene. Funi's vine-covered ceiling may instead be inspired by the Loggia degli Aranci at the Palazzina Marfisa d'Este, also located in Ferrara and probably painted in the early sixteenth century (Figure 42).⁷⁶

While the ceiling of Funi's Sala dell'Arengo is clearly inspired by the trompe l'oeil balcony scenes and arbor ceilings that decorate Ferrara's palaces, it is not a direct copy of these Renaissance examples. Instead of painting figures dressed in Renaissance costumes, like those on Garofalo's balcony (or in Funi's own *Orlando Furioso* panel), Funi fills his balcony scene with images of modern women. While Funi's modern female figures situate his balcony scene in the twentieth century, the strategy of modernizing history by including contemporary details in a historical scene dates back to Renaissance art. For example, the buildings in the background of Andrea Mantegna's *Stories of St. James* fresco cycle in the Ovetari Chapel (Figure 4, discussed in Chapter 1) reflect the architectural styles of Mantegna's fifteenth century, rather than those of St. James the Greater's time. In Funi's twentieth-century ceiling, as well as in Mantegna's

⁷⁴ Scardino, *Achille Funi e Il "Mito di Ferrara,"* 30.

⁷⁵ Alessandra Pattanaro, "The Frescoes in the Sala del Tesoro," *Ferrara: Voci di una città* 30 (2009), <http://rivista.fondazioneclarife.it/index.php/en/1999/10/item/655-gli-affreschi-della-sala-del-tesoro/function.file-put-contents>

⁷⁶ Scardino, *Achille Funi e Il "Mito di Ferrara,"* 30.

fifteenth-century frescoes, the presence of modern elements allows the viewer to experience the painted scene as an extension of her own contemporary world.⁷⁷

The perspective of Funi's balcony scene also differs from that of Garofalo's; while Garofalo depicts the railing of his balcony with a steep and realistic perspective, the flattened perspective of Funi's balcony scene appears unnatural and somewhat disorienting. Rather than reveal a lack of mastery over this perspectival technique, the unrealistic perspective of Funi's ceiling may reflect his desire to clearly feature the female figures in his balcony scene. If Funi had painted his ceiling with a perspective similar to that used by Garofalo, we would see only the heads and shoulders of his figures peering over the balcony railing, and would likely not be able to distinguish them as modern women. On the other hand, by flattening the perspective of the balcony railing and columns, Funi allows viewers to clearly see the upper bodies of his female figures, clothed in modern attire.

In an otherwise Renaissance-style room, these modern figures would remind viewers of the context in which the fresco cycle was painted, and may inspire them to rethink their interpretation of the rest of the cycle. At first glance, Funi's wall panels appear to be historically-faithful illustrations of legendary events, myths, and stories relevant to Ferrara's history. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, these panels also contain subtle references to the Fascist ideology of the government under which they were commissioned. For example, the statuary nudes in the corners of the Sala dell'Arengo call to mind the Fascist obsession with strong, virile bodies. Additionally, by including a self-portrait in his *Orlando Furioso* panel, Funi grounds his fresco cycle in modernity and reminds the viewer that what she sees is Funi's individual interpretation of Ferrara's legendary history, not an imitation of Renaissance fresco cycles.

⁷⁷ Keith Christiansen, *The Genius of Andrea Mantegna* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 11.

After being reminded of the cycle's modern context by the female figures on the ceiling, viewers might be more likely to notice the allusions to Fascist ideology in the cycle's other panels. Despite their position within the fresco cycle, the female figures also seem to mimic the role of the viewer; by gazing down upon the frescoes that decorate the room below them, they appear to be interpreting Ferrara's legendary history from a contemporary point of view, precisely as Funi would have wanted his viewers to do. Funi's allusions to contemporary society within his Renaissance-inspired ceiling grounds his *Mito di Ferrara* cycle in its early-twentieth-century historical context, visually demonstrating the ideas promoted in his article, "Rientriamo nella storia."

Conclusion

As signatories of the "Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores" and of the "Manifiesto della pittura murale," both Rivera and Funi demonstrate a commitment to pursuing muralism as a persuasive and didactic tool, and drawing selectively and rhetorically on historical and cultural sources to reinvent their respective nations' cultural identity. In addition to the overlapping goals of the larger mural movements in which Rivera and Funi participated, the two artists' individual articles similarly embrace a return to their countries' cultural traditions. Rivera praises existing pulquería paintings as representations of Mexican popular culture and traditions; however, in his own murals he combines elements of popular culture with cubist-derived techniques and crucially, with lessons he gleaned from his study of Italian Renaissance painting. Each of these sources enabled Rivera to develop and promote an idealized image of Mexico's cultural identity grounded in revolutionary ideology. On the other hand, Funi's Ferrara frescoes effectively illustrate his desire to draw inspiration from Italy's artistic past, while maintaining the modern and individual character of his work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the role of trompe l'oeil in Rivera's and Funi's murals as an example of an Italian Renaissance-inspired technique, adapted to meet both artists' goals of redefining their countries' cultural identity. Although the term *trompe l'oeil* was not coined until the nineteenth century, this interest in "deceiving the eye" can be traced back to Greek and Roman antiquity. Fifteenth-century developments in perspective, as well as an increased interest in humanistic studies, contributed to the popularity of trompe l'oeil techniques during the Renaissance.¹ As we saw in Tintoretto's grisaille panels for the ceiling of the Atrio Quadrato in the Doge's Palace, as well as in the painted pilasters that divide up the walls of the Sala dei Mesi in the Palazzo Schifanoia, architectural and sculptural illusions were popular in Renaissance Italian painting. According to John Shearman, the engagement of the spectator and the psychological effect of a work of art depend on this blurring of the boundaries between two-dimensional painted representations and the observer's three-dimensional space; in his discussion of the role of the viewer in Renaissance painting he describes the importance of "a fictional assumption made first by the artist and then by the spectator – the fiction of a continuum between the painted space and the real or more specifically liminal space."²

In Chapter 1 I examined Rivera's talent and curiosity for creating highly convincing painted representations of three-dimensional objects, beginning with his copy of a bas-relief of Saint Peter, at the age of 15. His interest in trompe l'oeil is evident in the grisailles that he painted on the second floor of the Court of Labor at the MPE, as well as those he completed at

¹ Anna Maria Giusti, *Art and Illusions: Masterpieces of Trompe l'Oeil from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Firenze: Mandragora 2009), 15-16.

² John Shearman, *Only connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 59.

the National Palace in the 1940s. In both cases, Rivera's monochrome panels resemble an architectural frieze made up of individually framed sculptural reliefs, and call to mind Tintoretto's ceiling grisailles, which Rivera sketched while visiting the Doge's Palace. The trompe l'oeil archways that frame each panel on the third floor of the Court of Fiestas at the MPE demonstrate that Rivera was also interested in architectural illusions. At Chapingo, Rivera's use of trompe l'oeil as a means for engaging viewers is evident in his decoration of the ceiling, on which he painted yellow trompe l'oeil images of agricultural symbols.

Similarly, in Chapter 2 I discussed Funi's use of trompe-l'oeil architectural elements to divide up the walls of the Sala dell'Arengo. Like the Renaissance artists who decorated the Sala dei Mesi at the Palazzo Schifanoia, Funi used faux pilasters to separate his panels, which appear to rest on a band of painted marble. The corners of Funi's Sala dell'Arengo feature figures of Greek gods, painted to look like classical statues on pedestals, and the trompe l'oeil columns on the ceiling of the room make the room appear to extend vertically beyond the actual ceiling. In addition to his architectural and sculptural illusions, Funi's depiction of Medoro's foot extending outside of the composition of *Orlando Furioso* further connects the space inhabited by the painted figures to the real space in which the viewer stands.

Like the Renaissance models from which Rivera and Funi likely drew inspiration, the trompe l'oeil elements in these two artists' murals serve to engage the viewer, by bringing the painted images into her real space. As spectators, we view framed easel paintings as fictional representations, regardless of the degree of naturalism achieved by the artist. On the other hand, when the painted figures and the spaces that they occupy within a mural appear to converge on our world, activating the architectural context and our place within it, it becomes difficult to regard the image as simply an artist's fictional representation. Rather, as Shearman indicates, the

scenes depicted within the mural become part of our actual surroundings, and we begin to lose sight of what is real and what is painted. This effect is particularly powerful in monumental images such as those created by Rivera and Funi, in which the viewer stands eye-to-eye with life-sized painted figures, or is even overshadowed by larger-than-life images.

This ambiguity is essential to Rivera and Funi's desire to reinvent their countries' cultural identities through mural painting. By framing their painted scenes with architectural and sculptural illusions, Rivera and Funi present their murals as truthful and realistic representations of Mexican and Italian history and culture. However, the manifestos and texts examined in Chapter 3 demonstrate that a realistic depiction of the past was not the primary goal of the murals that Rivera and Funi created. On the contrary, in these texts we saw that both Rivera and Funi favored muralism for its ability to engage and influence a wide audience. While both artists drew on historical and cultural sources, including Italian Renaissance art, their depictions of history and culture were not unbiased; instead, Rivera's and Funi's murals clearly reflect their personal opinions and priorities as twentieth-century artists attempting to bring together their respective nations under a unifying cultural identity. The two artists' use of *trompe l'oeil*, masks the fact that the "history" depicted in their murals is actually not truthful or realistic at all, but rather a reflection of their personal ideals, based on a highly manipulated and often completely fabricated vision of the past.

Rivera's and Funi's adaptation of Renaissance-inspired *trompe l'oeil* in their twentieth-century murals highlights the lessons in monumentality, spectator engagement, and persuasion that both artists drew from Italian Renaissance art. By applying these lessons to their own art, Rivera and Funi succeeded in creating visually-powerful murals, grounded in their personal

interpretations of historical tradition and capable of engaging a wide audience in the reinvention of national and cultural identity.

Images



Figure 1: Diego Rivera, *Academic Study of Saint Peter*, c. 1902, oil/canvas (Museo Frida Kahlo)

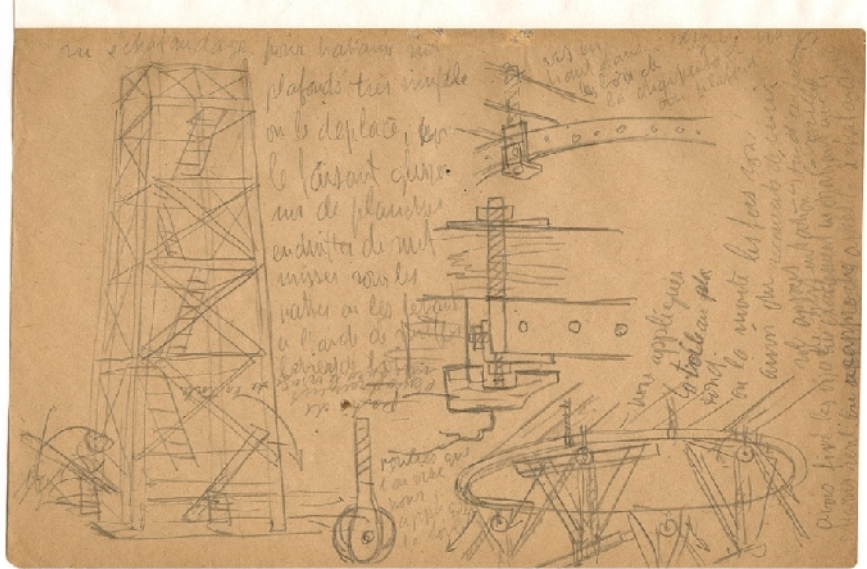


Figure 2: Rivera, sketch of mural scaffold, 1920-21 (Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art)



Figure 3: Rivera, *Creation*, 1922, encaustic, NPS, Mexico City (artstor.org)



Figure 8: Rivera, sketch of an unidentified church interior (Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art)



Figure 9: Rivera, Tehuanas, 1923, fresco, Court of Labor, first floor, MPE, Mexico City

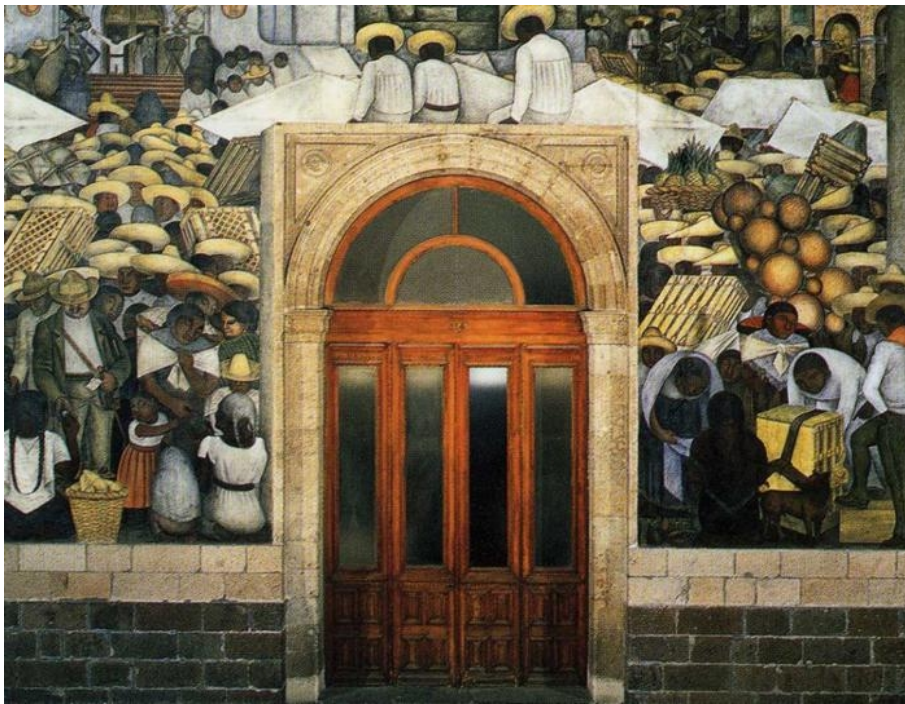


Figure 10: Rivera, *The Market/Tianguis*, 1923-24, fresco, Court of Fiestas, first floor, MPE, Mexico City (<http://www.inehrm.gob.mx/imagenes/rivera/15.jpg>)



Figure 1: Rivera, *Tehuanas*, ink drawing, 1922 (Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*)



Figure 12: Stefano da Verona, *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden*, c.1425-35, tempera on panel (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_of_the_Rose_Garden)



Figure 13: Rivera, sketch after *Madonna with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden* (Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art)

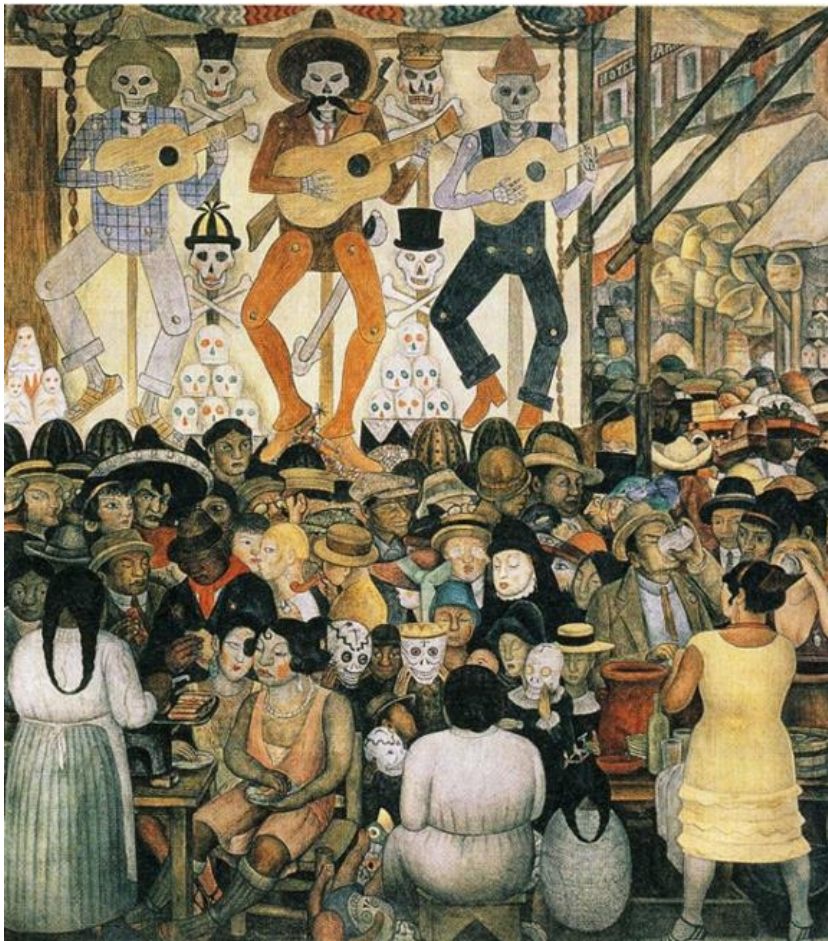


Figure 14: Rivera, *Urban Day of the Dead*, 1923-24, fresco, Court of Fiestas, first floor, MPE, Mexico City



Figure 15: Rivera, *Distribution of Arms*, 1928, fresco, Court of Fiestas, third floor MPE, Mexico City (artstor.org)



Figure 16: Rivera, detail of *Distribution of Arms*, 1928, fresco, Court of Fiestas, third floor MPE, Mexico City (artstor.org)



Figure 17: Rivera, *The Earth Enslaved*, 1926-27, fresco, Chapingo Chapel (artstor.org)

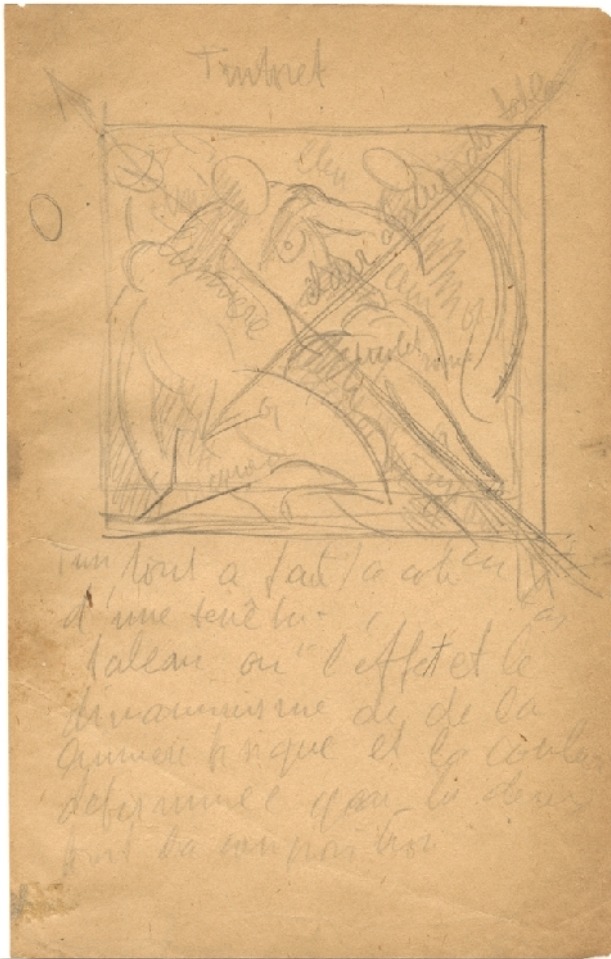


Figure 18: Rivera, sketch after Tintoretto's *Three Graces and Mercury* (Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art)



Figure 19: Tintoretto, *Three Graces and Mercury*, 1577-8, oil/canvas (artstor.org)

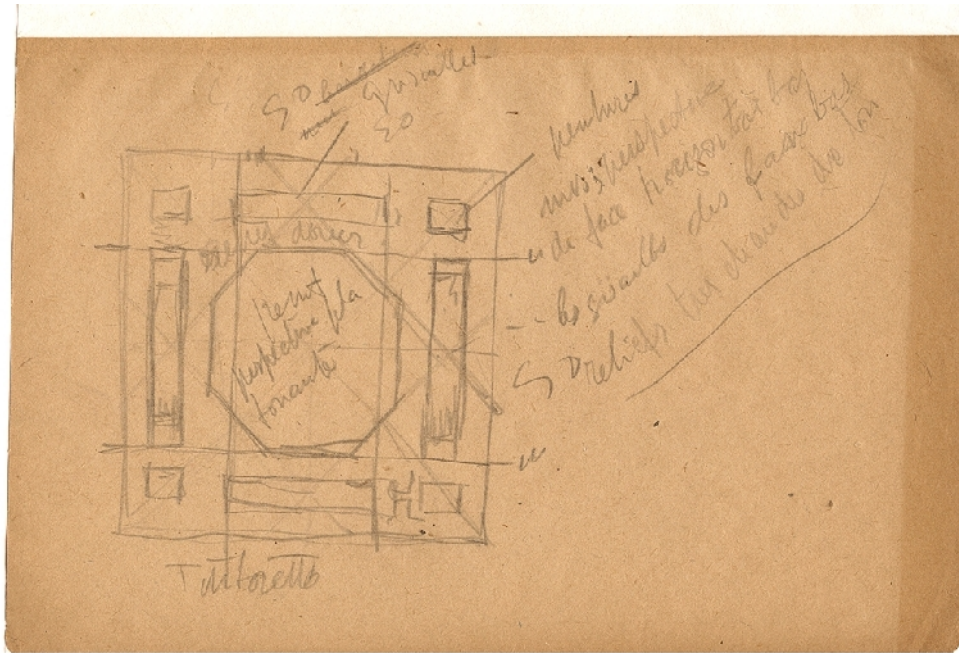


Figure 20: Rivera, sketch after Tintoretto's Atrio Quadrato ceiling
(Mary-Anne Martin/Fine Art)



Figure 21: Tintoretto, ceiling of the Atrio Quadrato, 1564-5,
Doge's Palace, Venice
(<http://travel.webshots.com/photo/2388016660094258363mpcQhO>)



Figure 22: Tintoretto, *Doge Girolamo Priuli Receiving the Sword from Justice in the Presence of Saint Jerome and Venetia*, 1564-5, oil/canvas
(<http://palazzoducale.visitmuve.it/en/il-museo/percorsi-e-collezioni/le-sale-istituzionali/piano-primi/>)



Figure 23: Rivera, Chapingo Chapel ceiling, 1926-27, fresco (artstor.org)



Figure 24: Rivera, Chapingo Chapel, 1926-27, fresco (artstor.org)



Figure 25: Rivera, detail of Chapingo Chapel ceiling, 1926-27, fresco (artstor.org)

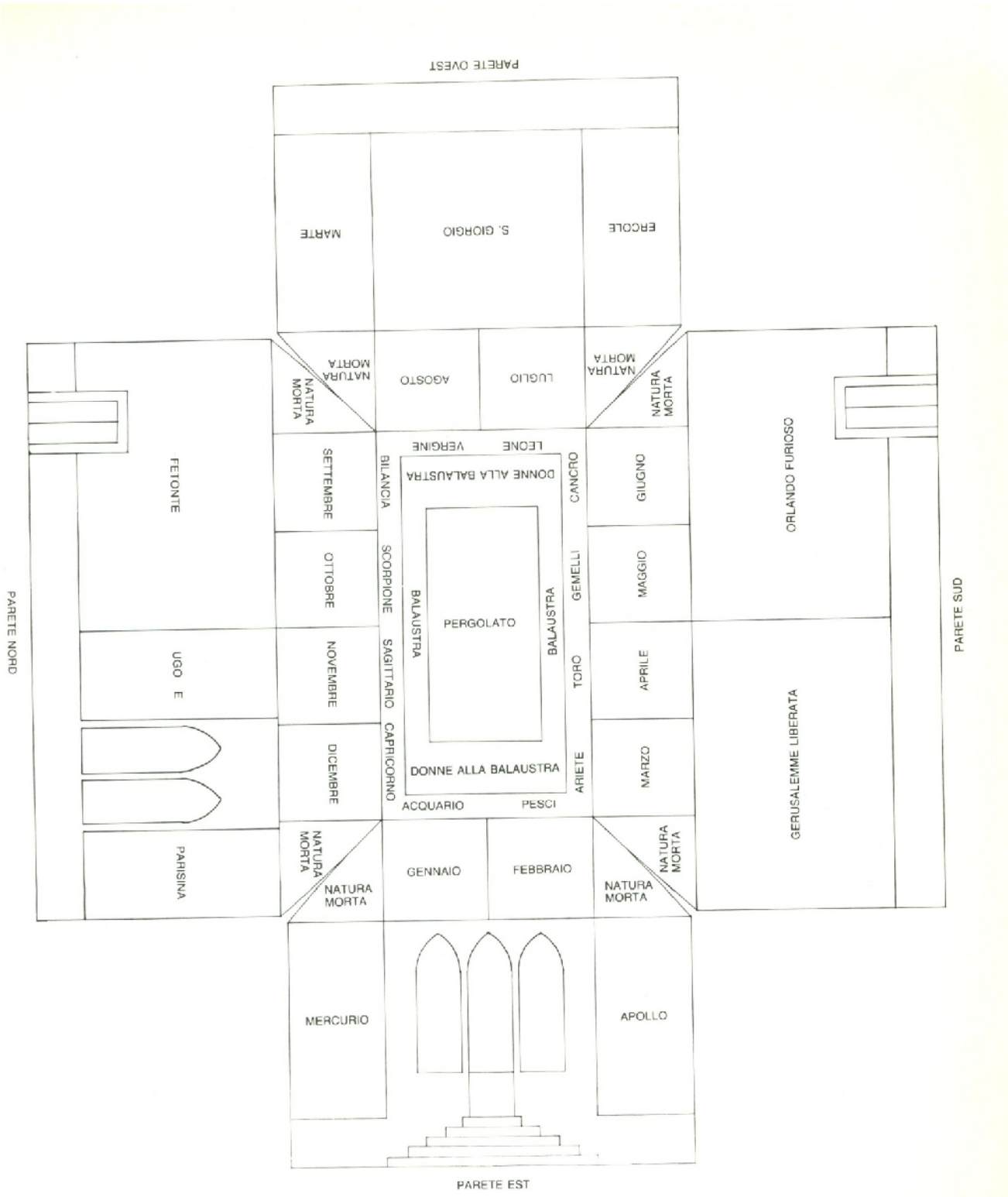


Figure 26: Layout of the Sala dell'Arengo

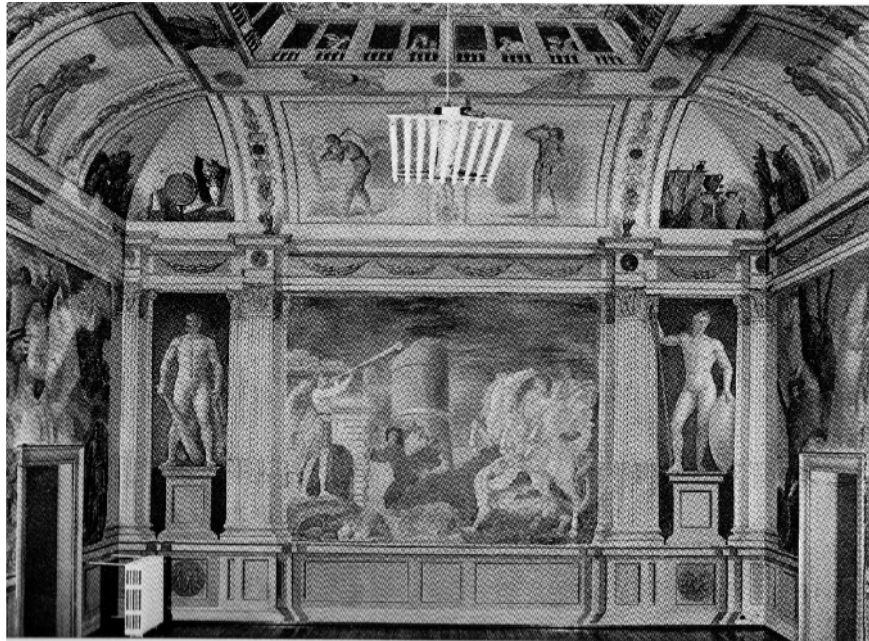


Figure 27: Funi, Sala dell'Arengo (Weber, *Achille Funi e la pittura murale fra le due guerre*)



Figure 28: Sala dei Mesi, Palazzo Schifanoia (http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/cossa/schifano/index.html)



Figure 29: Funi, *Orlando furioso*, Sala dell'Arengo (Quilici, *Il mito di Ferrara*)



Figure 30: Orlando (detail of *Orlando furioso*)

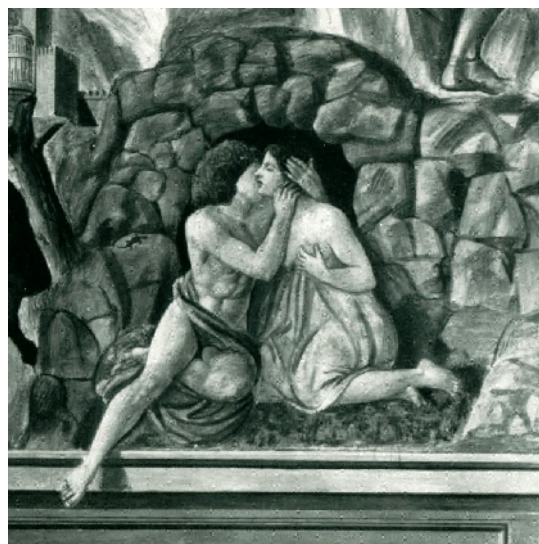


Figure 31: Angelica and Medoro (detail of *Orlando furioso*)



Figure 32: detail of lower band of April, *Sala dei Mesi*
(http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/cossa/schifano/2april/index.html)



Figure 33: detail of upper band of September, *Sala dei Mesi*
(http://www.wga.hu/html_m/t/tura/schifano/index.html)



Figure 34: Astolfo on the hippogriff, detail of *Orlando furioso*



Figure 35: horses, detail of lower band of June, *Sala dei Mesi*
(http://www.wga.hu/html_m/t/tura/schifano/index.html)

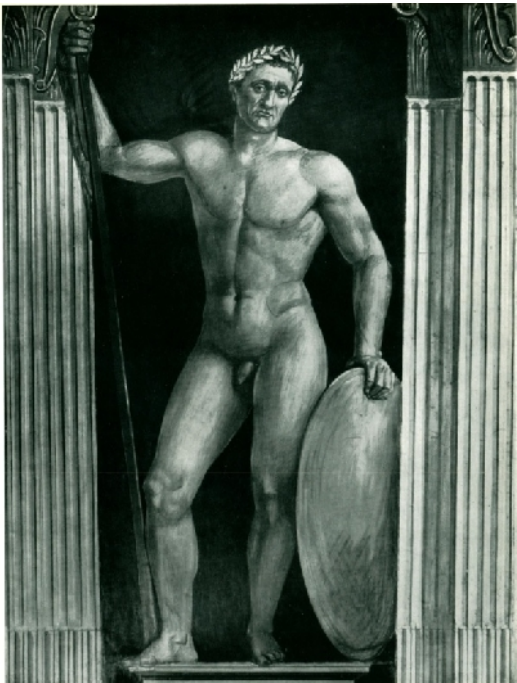


Figure 36: Funi, *Mars* (Quilici, *Il mito di Ferrara*)



Figure 37: Taurus, detail of middle band of April, *Sala dei Mesi*
(http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/cossa/schifano/2april/index.html)



Figure 38: Rivera, illustration for *Mexican Folkways* Vol. 2, no. 7, 1926

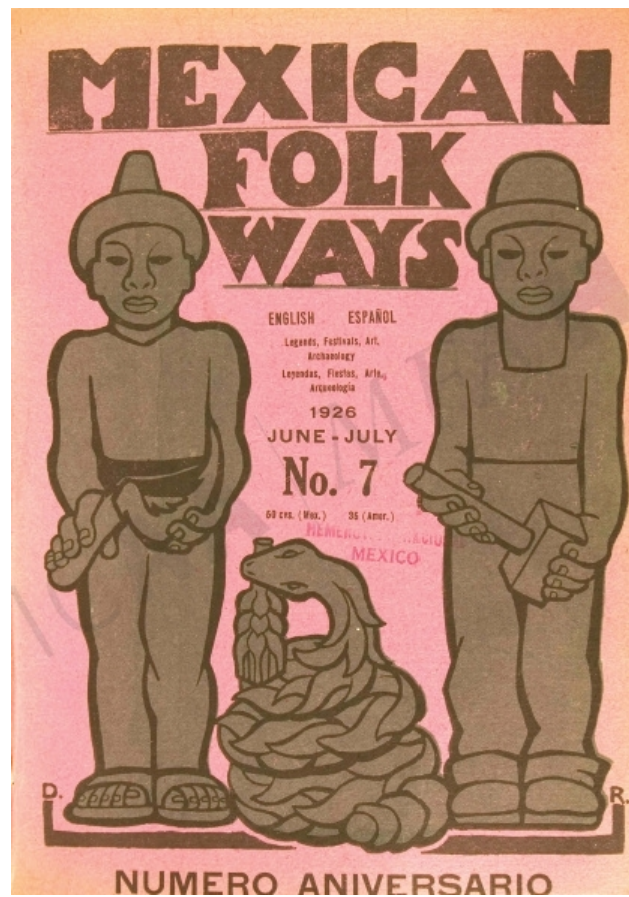


Figure 39: Diego Rivera, cover for *Mexican Folkways*
 (<http://icaadocs.mfah.org>)

Figure 40: Achille Funi, ceiling of Sala dell'Arengo, Palazzo Comunale, Ferrara (Quilici *Il mito di Ferrara*)

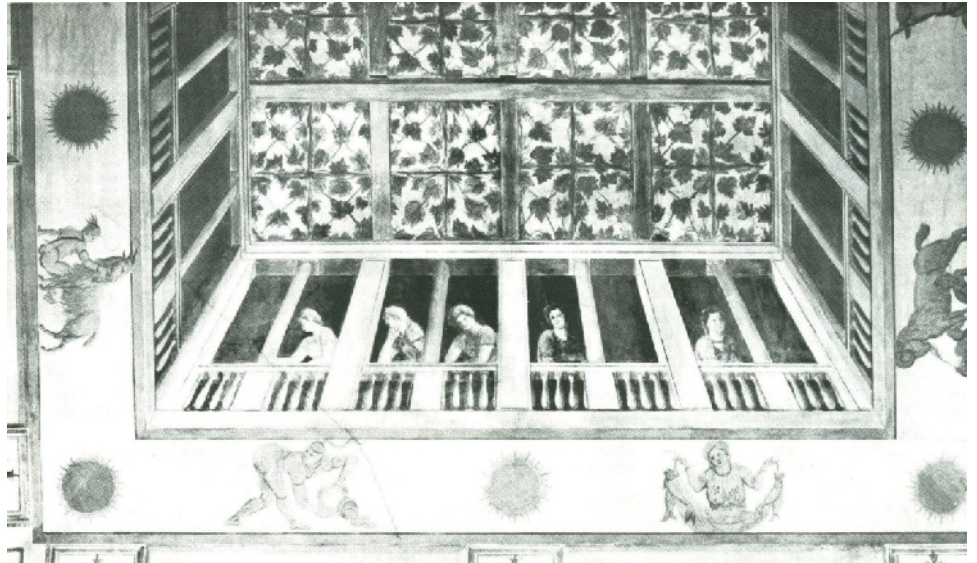


Figure 41: Garofalo, ceiling of Sala del Tesoro, Palazzo Costabili, Ferrara, c.1508 (<http://rivista.fondazioneclarife.it>)

Figure 42: Loggia degli aranci, Palazzina Marfisa d'Este, Ferrara, 16th century (www.panoramio.com)



Appendix: Primary Source Documents

Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores David Alfaro Siqueiros

Written on December 9, 1923; published in *El Machete* No. 7 (June 1924), Mexico City

A la raza indígena humillada durante siglos; a los soldados convertidos en verdugos por los pretorianos; a los obreros y campesinos azotados por la avaricia de los ricos; a los intelectuales que no estén envilecidos por la burguesía.

Camaradas:

La asonada militar de Enrique Estrada y Guadalupe Sánchez (los más significativos enemigos de las aspiraciones de los campesinos y de los obreros de México) ha tenido la importancia trascendental de precipitar y aclarar de manera clara la situación social de nuestro país, que por sobre los pequeños accidentes y aspectos de orden puramente político es concretamente la siguiente:

De un lado la revolución social más ideológicamente organizada que nunca, y del otro lado la burguesía armada: soldados del pueblo, campesinos y obreros armados que defienden sus derechos humanos, contra soldados del pueblo arrastrados con engaños o forzados por jefes militares políticos vendidos a la burguesía.

Del lado de ellos, los explotadores del pueblo, en concubinato con los claudicadores que venden la sangre de los soldados del pueblo que les confiara la Revolución.

Del nuestro, los que claman por la desaparición de un orden envejecido y cruel, en el que tú, obrero del campo, fecundas la tierra para que su brote se lo trague la rapacidad del encomendero y del político, mientras tú revientas de hambre; en el que tú, obrero de la ciudad, mueves las fábricas, hilas las telas y formas con tus manos todo el confort moderno para solaz de las prostitutas y de los zánganos, mientras a ti mismo se te rajan las carnes de frío; en el que tú, soldado indio, por propia voluntad heroica abandonas la tierra que laboras y entregas tu vida sin tasa para destruir la miseria en que por siglos han vivido las gentes de tu raza y de tu clase para que después un Sánchez o un Estrada inutilicen la dádiva grandiosa de tu sangre en beneficio de las sanguijuelas burguesas que chupan la felicidad de tus hijos y te roban el trabajo y la tierra.

No solamente todo lo que es trabajo noble, todo lo que es virtud, es don de nuestro pueblo (de nuestros indios muy particularmente), sino la manifestación más pequeña de la existencia física y espiritual de nuestra raza como fuerza étnica, brota de él, y lo que es más, su facultad admirable y extraordinariamente particular de *hacer belleza: el arte del pueblo de México es la manifestación espiritual más grande y más sana del mundo* y su tradición indígena es la mejor de

todas. Y es grande precisamente porque siendo popular es colectiva, y es por eso, que nuestro objetivo estético fundamental radica en socializar las manifestaciones artísticas tendiendo hacia la desaparición absoluta del individualismo, por burgués. *Repudiamos* la pintura llamada de caballete y todo el arte de cenáculo ultra-intelectual por aristocrático y exaltamos las manifestaciones de arte monumental por ser de utilidad pública. *Proclamamos* que toda manifestación estética, ajena o contraria al sentimiento popular es burguesa y debe desaparecer porque contribuye a pervertir el gusto de nuestra raza, ya casi completamente pervertido en las ciudades. Proclamamos que siendo nuestro momento social de transición entre el aniquilamiento de un orden envejecido y la implantación de un orden nuevo, los creadores de belleza deben esforzarse por que su labor presente un aspecto claro de propaganda ideológica en bien del pueblo, haciendo del arte, que actualmente es una manifestación de masturbación individualista, una finalidad de belleza para todos, de educación y de combate.

Porque sabemos muy bien que la implantación en México de un gobierno burgués traería consigo la natural depresión en la estética popular indígena de nuestra raza, que actualmente no vive más que en nuestras clases populares, pero que ya empezaba, sin embargo, a purificar los medios intelectuales de México; *lucharemos por evitarlo porque sabemos* muy bien que el triunfo de las clases populares traerá consigo un florecimiento, no solamente en el orden social, sino un florecimiento unánime de arte étnica, cosmogónica e históricamente trascendental en la vida de nuestra raza, comparable al de nuestras admirables civilizaciones autóctonas; *lucharemos sin descanso por conseguirlo*.

El triunfo de De la Huerta, de Estrada o de Sánchez, estética como socialmente, sería el triunfo del gusto de las mecanógrafas: la aceptación criolla y burguesa (que todo lo corrompe) de la música, de la pintura y de la literatura popular, el reinado de lo "pintoresco", del "kewpie" norteamericano y la implantación oficial de "l'amore e come zucchero". El amor es como azúcar.

En consecuencia, la contra-revolución en México prolongará el dolor del pueblo y deprimirá su espíritu admirable.

Con anterioridad los miembros del Sindicato de Pintores y Escultores nos adherimos a la candidatura del general don Plutarco Elías Calles, por considerar que su personalidad definitivamente revolucionaria, garantizaba en el gobierno de la República, más que ninguna otra, el mejoramiento de las clases productoras de México, adhesión que reiteramos en estos momentos con el convencimiento que nos dan los últimos acontecimientos político-militares, y nos ponemos a la disposición de su causa, que es la del pueblo, en la forma que se nos requiera.³

Hacemos un llamamiento general a los intelectuales revolucionarios de México para que, olvidando su sentimentalismo y zanganería proverbiales por más de un siglo, se unan a nosotros en la lucha social y estético-educativa que realizamos.

En nombre de toda la sangre vertida por el pueblo en diez años de lucha y frente al cuartelazo reaccionario, hacemos un llamamiento urgente a todos los campesinos, obreros y soldados

revolucionarios de México para que comprendiendo la importancia vital de la lucha que se avecina, y olvidando diferencias de táctica, formemos un frente único para combatir al enemigo común.

Aconsejamos a los soldados rasos del pueblo que, por desconocimiento de los acontecimientos y engañados por sus jefes traidores están a punto de derramar la sangre de sus hermanos de raza y de clase, mediten en que con sus propias armas, quieren los mistificadores arrebatarse la tierra y el bienestar de sus hermanos que la Revolución ya había garantizado con las mismas.

Por el proletariado del mundo

México, D.F., a 9 de diciembre de 1923.

El secretario general, *David Alfaro Siqueiros*; el primer vocal, *Diego Rivera*; el segundo vocal, *Xavier Guerrero*; *Fermín Revueltas*, *José Clemente Orozco*, *Ramón Alva Guadarrama*, *Germán Cueto*, *Carlos Mérida*.

Manifesto della pittura murale

Mario Sironi

Published in *La Colonna*, December 1933; signed by Mario Sironi, Achille Funi, Massimo Campigli, and Carlo Carrà

Il Fascismo è stile di vita: è la vita stessa degli Italiani. Nessuna formula riuscirà mai a esprimerlo compiutamente e tanto meno a contenerlo. Del pari, nessuna formula riuscirà mai a esprimere e tanto meno a contenere ciò che si intende qui per Arte Fascista, cioè a dire un'arte che è l'espressione plastica dello spirito Fascista. L'Arte Fascista si verrà delineando a poco a poco, e come risultato della lunga fatica dei migliori. Quello che fin d'ora si può e si deve fare, è sgombrare il problema che si pone agli artisti dai molti equivoci che sussistono. Nello Stato Fascista l'arte viene ad avere una funzione educatrice. Essa deve produrre l'etica del nostro tempo. Deve dare unità di stile e grandezza di linee al vivere comune. L'arte così tornerà a essere quello che fu nei suoi periodi più alti e in seno alle più alte civiltà: un perfetto strumento di governo spirituale. La concezione individuale dell'"arte per l'arte" è superata. Deriva di qui una profonda incompatibilità tra i fini che l'Arte Fascista si propone, e tutte quelle forme d'arte che nascono dall'arbitrio, dalla singolarizzazione, dall'estetica particolare di un gruppo, di un cenacolo, di un'accademia. La grande inquietudine che turba tuttora l'arte europea, è il prodotto di epoche spirituali in decomposizione. La pittura moderna, dopo anni e anni di esercitazioni tecnicistiche e di minuziose introspezioni dei fenomeni naturalistici di origine nordica, sente oggi il bisogno di una sintesi spirituale superiore.

L'Arte Fascista rinnega le ricerche, gli esperimenti, gli assaggi di cui tanto prolifico è stato il secolo scorso. Rinnega soprattutto i "postumi" di essi esperimenti, che malauguratamente si sono prolungati fino al nostro tempo. Benché vari in apparenza e spesso divergenti, questi esperimenti derivano tutti da quella comune materialistica concezione della vita che fu la caratteristica del secolo passato, e che fu profondamente odiosa. La pittura murale è pittura sociale per eccellenza. Essa opera sull'immaginazione popolare più direttamente di qualunque altra forma di pittura, e più direttamente ispira le arti minori. L'attuale rifiorire della pittura murale, e soprattutto dell'affresco, facilita l'impostazione del problema dell'Arte Fascista. Infatti: sia la pratica destinazione della pittura murale (edifici pubblici, luoghi comunque che hanno una civica funzione), siano le leggi che la governano, sia il prevalere in essa dell'elemento stilistico su quello emozionale, sia la sua intima associazione con l'architettura, vietano all'artista di cedere all'improvvisazione e ai facili virtuosismi. Lo costringono invece a temprarsi in quella esecuzione decisa e virile, che la tecnica stessa della pittura murale richiede: lo costringono a maturare la propria invenzione e a organizzarla compiutamente. Nessuna forma di pittura nella quale non predomini l'ordinamento e il rigore della composizione, nessuna forma di pittura "di genere" resistono alla prova delle grandi dimensioni e della tecnica murale. Dalla pittura murale sorgerà lo "Stile Fascista", nel quale la nuova civiltà si potrà identificare. La funzione educatrice della pittura è soprattutto una questione di stile. Più che mediante il soggetto (concezione

comunista), è mediante la suggestione dell'ambiente, mediante lo stile che l'arte riuscirà a dare un'impronta nuova all'anima popolare.

Le questioni di “soggetto” sono di troppo facile soluzione per essere essenziali. La sola ortodossia politica del “soggetto” non basta: comodo ripiego dei falsi “contenutisti”. Per essere consono allo spirito della Rivoluzione, lo stile della Pittura Fascista dovrà essere antico e a un tempo novissimo: dovrà risolutamente respingere la tendenza tuttora predominante di un'arte piccinamente abitudinaria, che poggia sopra un preteso e fondamentalmente falso “buon senso”, e che rispecchia una mentalità né “moderna” né “tradizionale”; dovrà combattere quegli pseudo “ritorni”, che sono estetismo dozzinale e un palese oltraggio al vero sentimento di tradizione.

A ogni singolo artista poi, s'impone un problema di ordine morale.

L'artista deve rinunciare a quell'egocentrismo che, ormai, non potrebbe che isterilire il suo spirito, e diventare un artista “militante”, cioè a dire un artista che serve un'idea morale, e subordina la propria individualità all'opera collettiva.

Non si vuole propugnare con ciò un anonimato effettivo, che ripugna al temperamento italiano, ma un intimo senso di dedizione all'opera collettiva. Noi crediamo fermamente che l'artista deve ritornare a essere uomo tra gli uomini, come fu nelle epoche della nostra più alta civiltà.

Non si vuole propugnare tanto meno un ipotetico accordo sopra un'unica formula d'arte — il che praticamente risulterebbe impossibile — ma una precisa ed espressa volontà dell'artista di liberare l'arte sua dagli elementi soggettivi e arbitrari, e da quella speciosa originalità che è voluta e rinutrita dalla sola vanità.

Noi crediamo che l'imposizione volontaria di una disciplina di mestiere, è utile a temprare i veri e autentici talenti. Le nostre grandi tradizioni di carattere prevalentemente decorativo, murale e stilistico, favoriscono potentemente la nascita di uno Stile Fascista. Tuttavia le affinità elettive con le grandi epoche del nostro passato, non possono essere sentite se non da chi ha una profonda comprensione del tempo nostro. La spiritualità del primo Rinascimento ci è più vicina del fasto dei grandi Veneziani. L'arte di Roma pagana e cristiana ci è più vicina di quella greca. Si è arrivati nuovamente alla pittura murale, in virtù dei principii estetici che sono maturati nello spirito italiano dalla guerra in qua. Non a caso ma per divinazione dei tempi, le più audaci ricerche dei pittori italiani si concentrano già da anni sulla tecnica murale e sui problemi di stile. La vita è segnata per il proseguimento di questi sforzi, fino al raggiungimento della necessaria unità.

La pintura de las pulquerías

Diego Rivera

Published in *Mexican Folkways* vol. 2, no. 7 (June-July 1926), Mexico City

Una de las manifestaciones más importantes de la pintura mexicana – lo hemos repetido ya muchas veces – es la decoración de fachadas e interiores de pulquerías y figones.

Naturalmente que para la burguesía nacional – desde el sesudo profesionista distinguido al simple capitalista zafio, de polainas, pasando por toda la masa anodina de gentes vestidas por dentro y por fuera dizque a la europea –; esta pintura de las pulquerías constituye una de la principales “vergüenzas de México.”

Allá, en tiempo de *don Porfirio*, hacia las postrimerías de su reinado, se quiso acabar con ella para mejor proteger a los “decoradores” de origen y procedencia mediterráneos, que volvieron abominables los interiores de muchas de nuestras iglesias y casi todas las casas de las ciudades importantes. Tratábase de la extensión del estilo civilizador e incorporador a lo europeo (Teatro Nacional). Se empezó el aniquilamiento en los barrios del centro, y sólo la “Revolución,” empezada en 1910, vino a salvar esta pintura genuina, aunque están perfectamente pretéritos los tiempos en que *don Benito Juárez* – según me contaba mi maestro *don André Ríos* – fue de gran chistera y frae, acompañado de su *ministro de Instrucción Pública y Bella Artes*, a la inauguración de la “*Fuente embriagadora*,” pulquería se ese nombre, sita, por aquel entonces, en la calle de Tacuba, y con motivo del cuadro de *don Petronilo Monroy*, cuyo título era el nombre de la pulquería, obra *popular* de amable belleza, que yo, allá por mis siete años de edad, alcancé a ver todavía, y la recuerdo con una especia de agrado y ternura, no menores que las que siento por la “*Source*,” del maestro de Montauban, que guarda el Louvre. En cuanto a la bella Psiquis, de alas de libélula, que bebía “*neuhtli*” en el chorro surgido de marmóreo surtidor, obra de *don Petronilo*, admirada por *don Benito*, quién sabe dónde habrá ido a parar.

Esta pintura de pulquerías, por estar ejecutada en tono alegre, complete la de los retablos, en la cual, naturalmente, predomina el sentido dramático; no que en la se las pulquerías deje de sentirse la indispensable “tragedia;” pero, como en la vida popular de cada día, ésta se mezcla siempre con la aguda y profunda ironía, que, como cualidad fundamental, se encuentra invariablemente en el fondo del espíritu de la gente mexicana, cualquiera que sea el estrato social a que pertenezca y la situación agradable o desagradabilísima en que se encuentre.

Ironía que, mezclada a la “tragedia” y a lo que los vasconcelistas llamarían “estado dionisiaco,” constituye la única expresión realmente mexicana y actual en todo orden de cosas: *la vacilada*.

En la pintura, esa ironía se traduce muy curiosamente no sólo en la parte anecdótica y puramente temática, sino en lo más intrínseco de la modalidad plástica; y no quiero decir con esto que solamente en el modo de ver y de representar los seres y las cosas, y en el carácter que se les

imprime, sino en las mismas funciones de formas puras – formas en su verdadero sentido y justo concepto, es decir, una existencia compenetrada de color y limitación de volumen y superficie -, el mexicano es, eminentemente y antes que nada, un colorista; es inútil insistir en la influencia que el color ejerce sobre él y la que él impone a todas las cosas que crea, por medio del color, hasta a las cosas de comer. Si alguna designación se puede dar justamente a la cocina mexicana, es la de *cocina colorista*, lo mismo por lo que atañe al sentido de la vista, que al del gusto y el olfato.

Yo he visto muchas veces a pobrísima gente campesina hacer un recorrido de muchos kilómetros, volviendo del mercado de la ciudad al misérrimo pueblo de sus penas y actividades, llevando invertido más del tercio de la ganancia del día en un ramito de flores, porque ni una crece en el tequezquital que difícilmente explota.

Me asomé a todas las casas de adobe, tan viejas y tan miserables, que más parecen ya toperas que guaridas de hombres, y en el fondo de cada uno de aquellos agujeros, vi siempre algunas flores, algunas estampas y pinturas, algunos ornamentos recortados en papel de colores vivos, todo ello, constituyendo una especie de altar que atestiguaba la religión del color.

Es tal la potencia del factor estético en la masa campesina mexicana que, de no haber otros, bastaría por sí solo para dar confianza en el papel que ella representará forzosamente en la futura organización americana. Por algo la primera manifestación de la *Tonantzin*, del terrible tiempo nuevo, *fue hacer aparecer rosas* es el peñón acervo y deplorable del *Tepeyac*.

Los pintores de pulquería son los obreros pintores decoradores que, solicitados para aplicar, en todo el esplendor de su nobleza, el oficio que poseen, desde el fondo liso, la raya bien trazada, las letras bien dibujadas bien levantadas de volumen, hacia los *muñecos* cúspides del oficio, cumplen integralmente su cometido. No importa que esos *monos* sean a veces copias de innoble originales; la gran jerarquía del noble oficio de pintor de puertas, dignifica el excrementismo de los falsos artistas de la burguesía, y una verdadera estética proletaria – pura y verdaderamente proletaria – se engasta en el arabesco ocasional.

También hay casos en que la visión directa o la del objetivo que produjo una instantánea, sirven al pintor; en cualesquiera de esas circunstancias suelen producirse magníficas obras, y la originalidad y la fuerza de ellas residen en su anima estética y su plástica pura, anima y plástica puramente obreras.

Todos los organismos educacionales controlados por la burguesía y sus agentes de sugestión, desde la prensa, libros, cátedras y pulpitos, sin contar con los escaparates de las tiendas, *concurrén para imponer a la masa proletaria el gusto burgués*, destinado a orientar el consumo hacia los productos cuya veta beneficia al rico y no a la comunidad. Y la masa proletaria se encuentra contaminada por el gusto burgués, y por el gusto burgués de más baja calidad, por eso a veces no sabe reconocerse a sí misma en algunas obras de arte, producidas por hombres que

son verdaderos condensadores y transmisores de la aspiración colectiva, es decir, que en ese caso, la masa se desconoce a sí misma. En cambio, cuando se manifiesta de por sí en sitios que la burguesía, por conveniencia y cálculo le ha dejado libres, vence la imposición burguesa y se expresa a sí misma, recobrando su originalidad.

Tal es el caso de ciertas iglesias y de todas las pulquerías, únicos lugares que la burguesía ha dejado en plena posesión del pueblo, porque tabernas y santuarios sirven exactamente para el mismo fin, ya que el alcohol y la religión son buenos estupefacientes (naturalmente, se ha repetido mil veces esto) y anestésicos eficaces para que la masa proletaria no sienta tan fuerte el hambre y el dolor, y no le sobrevengan veleidades de reivindicaciones y organizaciones subversivas. Sucede también que, felizmente, el ramo de pulques produce considerabilísimos impuestos, ¿por qué no pagan también contribución los santuarios milagrosos?...Pero, entonces, ¿qué sucedería con la buena pintura? Pues que, como el pueblo no perdería su potentísimo factor estético, la pintura proletaria se haría sobre los muros de los edificios públicos porque, libre de los anestésicos, el pueblo haría realmente suyos los edificios públicos. Sólo que para suprimir esos estupefaciente y anestésicos es tan indispensable una acción estética verdaderamente revolucionaria como todas las demás acciones encaminadas a construir el nuevo arreglo económico, eficaz y armónico de la verdadera civilización, la que construyan los hombres productores en armonía entre ellos y la tierra.

La pintura de pulquerías es un arte completo; el de decorar una fachada y un interior, combinando muchos elementos diferentes dentro de un todo perfectamente armónico, superficies de silencio, formas abstractas en movimiento, recorridos de color en acción violenta, sólidas estatificaciones plásticas, cifras, imágenes, ornamentos, imitaciones de materias, todo está presente y todo contribuye al valor de cada una de las partes y al del conjunto. Esto es una demostración o más bien dicho, un anticipo, sobre las modalidades *del arte del orden nuevo*, y también demuestra, por analogía de resultado, que en las tendencias plásticas, llamadas de vanguardia, hay un gran coeficiente que no es solamente especulación intelectual burguesa, sino producto de una planta que tiene raíces profundas en lo humano.

Rientriamo nella storia

Achille Funi

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Credo che le cosiddette “esperienze” figurative siano per esaurire ormai ogni curiosità intellettuale ed espressiva, e che l’esercizio dell’arte torni ad essere una cosa seria. Non voglio dire che cesserà tanto presto il loro particolare fascino, specie in pittura, ove la rappresentazione frammentaria soddisfa se medesima così facilmente, con la varietà delle formule, le piccole e numerose risorse. E non sarà da un momento all’altro che i giovani si persuaderanno a rinunciare al diletto di espressioni elementari, e simboliche, rese plausibili, anzi, alate addirittura, per aromi ed essenze letterarie. Sono certo, tuttavia, che aiuterà man mano una naturale stanchezza e noia delle maniere di figurare per schermi semplicistici o esterni, per cifre, per le eleganti e pesanti voluttà d’astrazione che hanno turbato l’esercizio dell’arte pittorica in questi ultimi decenni.

Che cosa verrà allora se non un richiamo alla nostra civiltà artistica? E il passato, questa parola che ha avuto per noi un così grave significato polemico, non tornerà a significare e a essere storia, e non illuminerà nuovamente al nostro animo il semplice e alto segreto della poesia figurativa, col riporre l’unico e vero problema dell’arte, cioè lo studio ampio, energico della forma, che sola può contenere ed esprimere la ricchezza ed esperienza umana dell’artista.

In queste domande è contenuta una certezza, frutto della mia operosità di pittore, in questo ultimo tempo, che mi ha dato la fortuna di provarmi in grandi figurazioni murali. E ho avuto anche l’occasione, naturalmente, di discutere sulla possibilità di riprendere con valore di energia espressiva, e diciamo pure con dignità, la pittura a fresco, e anche dell’influenza che essa potrà avere sulla pittura di cavalletto, che non abbandonerò certo, e non sarà, come qualcuno pensa, tradita. L’aver io figurato temi religiosi, intanto, non toglie nulla alla mia certezza, che la pittura murale possa vagliare e consolidare le nostre forze ed esperienze di pittori moderni. E, anzi, ho la persuasione più viva che l’obbligo rispettoso delle immagini tradizionali e di quelle forme, che rappresentano una delle più alte prospettive della civiltà artistica, ponga il pittore di fronte all’ardua verità e gloria del dipingere. Lo studio e la fatica da compiere lo costringerà alla più tesa attenzione verso la forma e alla sua realtà figurativa. E, penetrando e interpretando le forme magistrali, sentirà il conforto e la speranza di ricongiungersi ai mondi geniali delle figurazioni. Nella contemplazione di essi, intenderà come la loro storia si svolga, e per quali principi miri e tocchi all’eccellenza.

Il pittore moderno anela a che si chiarisca il senso di un’altra parola, che l’ha fatto tanto sognare ed errare: modernità. Bisogna che egli giunga a riconoscere come siano tutte moderne le belle forme create, e a ravvisare in esser i problemi costanti delle rappresentazione, i medesimi di oggi e di domani, il dramma, come noi preferiamo dire, dell’espressione figurativa. Non voglio certo concludere che si debba spegnere il tono della nostra personalità pittorica, la quale, dato che in

qualche misura consista, non potrà che atteggiarsi a suo modo, secondo gli originali suoi accenti. Non si tratterà neppure di rinnegare il colore dei nostri cieli, delle nostre acque, l'impasto della nostra luce, il lineamento della figura contemporanea, e imitare l'aurora lontana delle forme, i fulgori e le ombre per sempre fermate nelle lontane figurazioni. Si tratterà invece di ricominciare la fatica che condusse al prodigio della nostra storia pittorica. Ed ecco, l'assiduità fondamentale dell'esercizio del disegno, per fortificarsi nel vasto possesso della realtà. E quindi la studiosa, intensa ricerca della concisione e splendore del linguaggio pittorico, da riconquistare tutta nell'indagine formale, anzi nell'antica e nuova poetica di questa indagine. Direi che non è neppure possibile pensare che tutto quello che è stato fino a oggi dipinto si cancelli nel buio, quello che è stato dettato, intendo, dall'amore del dipingere. Ma non è da pensare nemmeno che i nuovi accenti e accordi del nostro sparso sentimento configurino un reale mondo d'arte, né che pongano un inviolabile divieto a che si configuri.

Sono le lacrime del nostro lungo e necessario errare. Bisogna asciugarle. E mettersi in grado di tornare a essere maestri d'espressione, nel senso che il mondo della nostra realtà non possa sfuggire al magistero delle nostre linee e dei nostri colori.

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