

## **MEXICAN MURALISTS**

adapted from: <http://staff.esuhsd.org/~balochie/studentprojects/mexmuralists/index.html>

The Muralist Movement in Mexico started in the early 1900's. Some of the greatest painters of the 20th century were a direct result of this period in art. Vasconcelos, creator of the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico, hired some of these artists like David Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera to paint the walls of public buildings in Mexico. Another influential artist was Rufino Tamayo. He painted with fiery reds and yellows of Mexico's native Indians. They all painted the history and soul of the Mexican people. Many depicted the Aztecs. In 1910 plans to overthrow President Diaz were made. Diaz, a dictator, eventually resigned. He was a symbol of everything that was corrupt in Mexico. Artists expressed their opinions, criticisms, and appreciation of the new Mexico through their paintings. They got their message across to the literate and the illiterate alike and earned world wide recognition.

### **Diego Rivera**

Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato, Mexico, on December 8, 1886, along with his twin, José Carlos who died at age one and a half. He was christened Diego María de la Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez. His father moved the family to Mexico City in 1892. By the time Diego was three he was already making sketches of the world around him. "One of my earliest memories of my youth is that I was always drawing." said Rivera of his childhood.

Five years after the Riveras moved to Mexico City, Diego attended the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts. Diego attended night classes for a couple of years; when he won a scholarship he was finally able to enroll in regular day classes. Although Diego learned his understanding of structure and composition, a major influence on his work and life was the printmaker José Guadalupe Posada.

In 1902, Rivera led his classmates in the president of the reelection of President Porfirio Diaz and they were temporarily expelled. He decided to begin his independent career. During this period it seemed as if he was trying to express his own free style. He experimented, painting many landscapes.

Diego left Mexico to travel to Spain (1907- 1908), then to France where he spent almost ten years. Then he went to Italy. All the while in Europe, he studied artists such as El Greco and Cézanne. His work was greatly influenced by his European studies. At one point he was even part of the Cubist's circle.

In 1921 he returned to Mexico and began his mural work. His first murals weren't a big success because he hadn't yet found his own style which included the culture of his native land. His favorite subject to paint was the Indians. He captured moments in Mexican history such as the Earth, the farmer, the laborer, costumes and popular characters. His work was simple and colorful. He claimed that he was interested more in content than form, but his technique was without compare. He used almost perfect symmetry. Many

critics believe his best work was done on the walls of the Agricultural School at Chapingo.

From 1930 -1934 Rivera traveled to the U.S. He painted six mural in San Francisco, Detroit and New York. Although he received acclaim from many, his work was not always welcomed. His work at Rockefeller Center no longer exists; it was torn down because it reflected Diego's communist beliefs.

### **José Clemente Orozco**

José Clemente Orozco was born on November 23,1883 in Ciudad Guzman, Jalisco. When his father died he had to get a job to help support the family. José got a job as a political cartoonist and draftsman. He worked as an illustrator from 1911-1924. When the violent military period of the Mexican Revolutionary War ended, Orozco decided to start his career as a muralist. He had extensive training at the Academy of San Carlos, where Diego Rivera also studied. Dr. Alt, a teacher at the academy greatly inspired Orozco. His first mural was painted on July 7th, 1923.

From 1917-1920 he lived in the U.S. He moved to New York to test himself without the support of his family. His left hand had blown off in an accident with gunpowder. While in New York he searched for himself and the path the rest of his life would take. Orozco also got the opportunity to paint some murals in California.

Once again back in Mexico, he continued to paint. Hands were an important part of his paintings. He drew heavy muscular figures that stood out from the geometric backgrounds. Orozco used dark colors to represent human cruelty and the reality of war. Orozco craved uniqueness and didn't want to be put in a category. He rejected attention from the press. He avoided the gallery market because of its commercial emphasis. He ended up settling in Guadalajara after his seven years in the U.S.

### **David Alfaro Siqueiros**

David Alfaro Siqueiros was another in the trio of muralists that greatly influenced the art world. He may have been the most innovative of the three, because his style of experimentation with the integration of traditional Mexican art and modern art is quite unique. His revolutionary art work paralleled the radical changes taking place in Mexico at the time.

Siqueiros' style was influenced by Michelangelo during his studies in Europe from 1919-1922. His work contains the powerful, foreshortened figures characteristic of Michelangelo and the bold perspective of Baroque art throughout his career. It was the futurist, Boccioni, that gave David his love of the modern age; therefore he began to incorporate machinery, speed, science, and technology into his art. He was able to do all of this and still convey a message of social issues to the common people.

Siqueiros painted his first mural in 1923 at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. In his early murals his modern/traditional style was already evident. Though he used traditional fresco painting techniques, the finished product reflected his recent visit to Europe.

The next stage in Siqueiros' career began with a visit to the United States. His stay there from 1923 to 1938 caused him to completely change his mediums and materials. Technological advances led to his experimentations with acrylics, resins, and asbestos. He also began to use the airbrush to apply paint. He studied the use of pyroxlene. Siqueiros searched for anything, including the projector and the camera, that would stimulate his creative process. He spent 1936 working with a group of artists, one of which was Jackson Pollock, experimenting.

In 1939 he returned to Mexico which ended his period of experimenting; experimenting that would really pay off. His work at the Hospital de la Raza is considered to be some of his best. He used all of his new techniques to create *La tecnología que destruye convertidad por el trabajador en instrumento de paz, libertad, y bienestar*.

David Alfaro Siqueiros went on to produce many other masterpieces, always pushing the limits of change and innovation. His successful career will live on through his monumental work.