

# THE POSTERS

Jean Charlot

During the 1960s and 1970s, a bona fide U.S.A. mural renaissance made a giant splash on the street walls of our megalopolises—Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York—sprouted miraculously from the sparse grass of our black, brown, and latin ghettos and other dilapidated neighborhoods. Disdainfully tagged by an “upstairs” elite as fence art, fireplug art, ashcan art, it attracted in its early days a suspicious gathering of police cars, whitewash buckets at the ready. It took politicians courage to back this new kind of free speech, noiseless yet deafening in its absolute sincerity.

U.S.A. street murals’ earliest admirers, the men and women passersby, felt strangely moved as they recognized themselves in these heroically scaled figures. Never before in the U.S.A. had mainstream art been confronted so blatantly by art for the many, making painfully obvious the unbridgeable chasm between Lazarus and Mammon.

Murals, a substantial portion of the Chicano renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s, blend both traditions, Anglo and Mexican, into a true creation. Sheer size reminiscent of Michelangelo’s is a heady wine. Less has been made of humbler folk sources, penny sheets hawked in the streets of the Mexican capital by *papeleros*, ragged urchins with arms full of political pamphlets illustrated by the great master of folk graphics, Don José Guadalupe Posada.

Rupert Garcia, unimpressed by sheer size and working as a screen printer, is one of the few among Chicanos who successfully adopted graphics as his major form of expression. To condense on a smaller surface is in no way to simplify. Though dissimilar in size, posters and murals share many a secret affinity. Both are visually shared by people on the move, both first perceived obliquely under perspective distortions that it is the poster artist’s and mural artist’s job to minimize, delivering the message clearly. Pasted to the wall, posters become murals, and in the silkscreen technique, Garcia’s images of political and cultural events retain a measure of majesty.

What sparked his dedication is a recently created locution, a *third world*, an attempted mea culpa for an obsolete term, *melting pot*, that implied contempt during the first years of our existence as a Nation for the ethnic and cultural apport of immigrants. The small scale of Rupert Garcia’s placards does not constrict this crusader’s world wide range. To bring it to the fore, all that Rupert Garcia needs to do is to follow the beat of his own heart.