PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF CHARLOT IN MEXICO

By EDWARD WESTON

This is not to be a critical estimation of Jean Charlot's work, nor a biographical sketch: an article by Anita Brenner in last week's Carmelite covered the ground.

I would again call attention to the exhibit—the first in the West—at Denny-Watrous Gallery, of one of the most vital painters who stem directly from the much discussed "Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors,"—the core of the Mexican renaissance. The Syndicate has long since disbanded, but the work of several members, for instance, Rivera, Orozco, Charlot, is more than ever discussed and recognized, especially in the United States where all three are now working: Rivera painting a fresco for the San Francisco Stock Exchange, Orozco, for the new School of Social Research, N. Y., Charlot living in New York, his work purchased for important contemporary collections.

I met Charlot in 1922 when he visited my first Mexican exhibit in the "Aztec Land." At once I liked him personally, later his interest in photography brought us closer together. We exchanged paintings and drawings for photographs,we went on excursions together, we dined together.

For those dinners at Charlot's I have very fond memories! They were French no matter if the food, the dishes, the recipes were Mexican: the expression, the "air," was entirely French! The violet laden table was presided over by his mother, a woman I consider a privilege to have known,—cultured, distinguished in bearing, with fine critical judgement, she undoubtedly held a significant place in Jean's growth as an artist. She has gone, I salute her memory.

As before mentioned, one basis for the friendship which formed between Charlot and myself was his understanding and keen appreciation of photography as a contemporary expression. Photography has changed the world's eyesight, it is the great destroyer of bad painting, clearing the way for a new vision. A painter of today who does not recognize this—granting he has seen photography, can be dismissed as belonging to a decadent culture,—and photographers who imitate these myopic painters of Calendar Art are equally unmentionable.

Shortly after arriving in Mexico we inaugurated "open house" Saturday evenings. About eight different nationalities were represented, each taking turn in serving food typical of their country. The revolution was on, the hall table heaped with "pistols" and cartridge belts unbuckled for better dancing, presented a war-like aspect. The gatherings grew out of bounds, in size, and in mixture. Came generals, cabinet members, the "syndicate of painters," the expatriated, professors—it couldn't last. Jean and Madame Charlot would be there, also Mexican officers comparing bullet-holes in their respective anatomies, and lumbering in late, Diego Rivera, weary and bedaubed after eighteen hours as a day-labourer, painting frescoes at four dollars per.

Jean too is indefatigable, happiest when at work. Turning back in my day-book to December 1925, I read: Spent three hours going over Jean's new drawings and paintings with intense interest and pleasure. One can always expect a fresh approach, he is forever experimenting, changing, he has no mannerisms, not in colour, brush-work, arrangement, subject nor medium. And further on, this: "Went to Jean's for chocolate at seven, taking reproductions of the Pan American exhibit, Los Angeles. 'Really though,' he said, 'I am so angry with painters and ninety-seven per cent of paintings, I get to hate them,' and turning over the paper, 'now look at this, it is something fine, a press photo of a football player in action!" And then, on August thirtieth, 1926: "Called on Jean. I always go with expectations, and am never disapointed. His new work from Yucatan, in contrast to the sombre, heavy painting done here, sparkled with brilliant, jewel-like colour. He showed me a caricature of Mrs. X— of C—, painted with all the derision he felt after tea with a female art patron."

A finely balanced personality, sensitized, not merly sensitive,—Charlot—keen analyst and deep observer of life, may delicately, ridicule, broadly chuckle, or create monumental form,but always with the surety of a technique which effaces all effort.

World-wide overproduction applies to art. Thousands of "artists" should turn to house painting. We need Charlot.