

Today
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New Charlots at St. Mary's

by CARL MERSCHER

LAST SUMMER, in addition to his work as a visiting professor at Notre Dame, Jean Charlot painted murals for the new Fine Arts Building at nearby St. Mary's. These architectonic pictures are meant to interpret the various lively arts as practiced by various lively people such as Sophocles, a Hopi Snake Dancer, St. Paul, and a little Indian boy taming his water buffalo with a flute.

The important panels in terms of subject matter are Our Lady of Guadalupe (above) and Veronica's veil (right), both instances of divine image making, Mary's figure on the bur-lap cloak of an Indian and the engraving of Christ's Passion on a linen cloth by Himself. On the next two pages the majority of the other pictures are shown through the courtesy of Sister M. Madeleva, C.S.C.

Charlot was born in Paris in 1898. He is married and has four children, whom he considers his greatest works of art. He worked for the Mexican government during the renascence then going on in mural painting, 1922-26. He was special painter-archeologist with the excavators of the lost Mayan civilization in Yucatan, 1926-29. As lecturer, writer and, above all, muralist he has literally covered most of the western hemisphere. His major wall paintings are



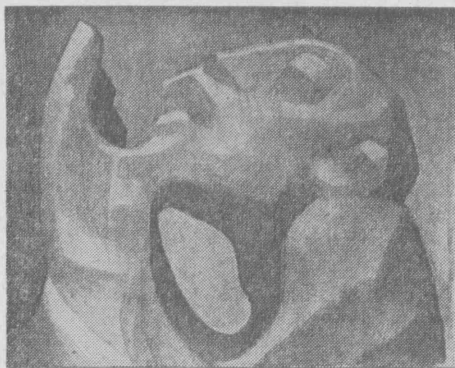
in New Jersey, Iowa, Georgia, Hawaii, and now at Notre Dame, St. Mary's and Good Shepherd parish in Detroit last summer. After teaching all over the American map he is now Professor of Art at the University of Hawaii, studying Chinese culture and adding to his great knowledge of both the Americas and the Old World.

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ABOVE: St. Paul Sewing a Tent. He actually accepted no money for his preaching, but made a living as a missionary making, selling, or repairing tents. Perhaps today many writers would be better writers if they took up some branch of the arts which requires physical activity and brainwork other than punching a typewriter. At any rate, working as a tent-maker or preaching, or being not only a painter but the producer of finely written essays, seems to have harmed neither St. Paul nor our painter here.



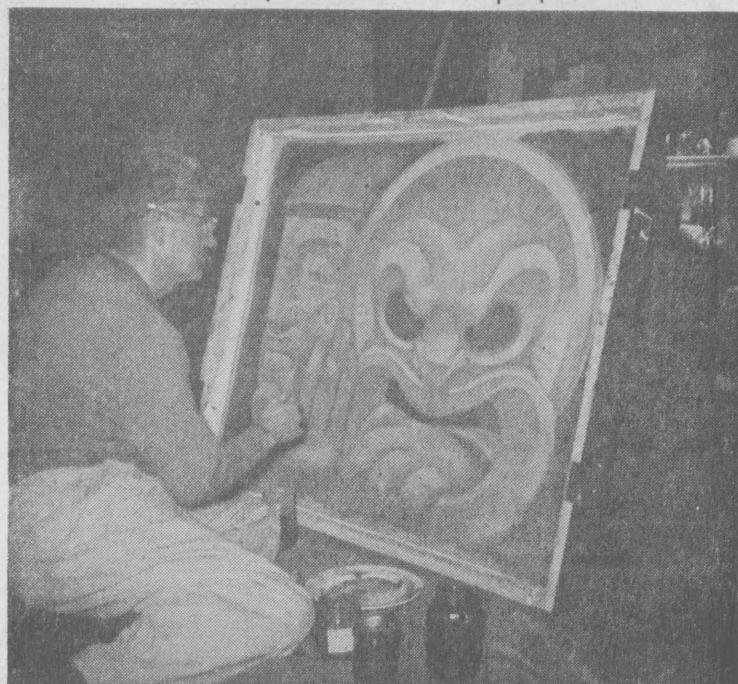
The figure above is Adam, who represents ceramics and sculpture. God the Father was in a sense the First Sculptor when He "formed man of the slime of the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7)

Here Adam is so being made and in the act of coming into life he is shown as an adorer and giver of thanks back to His Creator for the joy of living.



The figure above is St. Genasius, the Comedian. He is shown with a mask because Roman actors wore masks to emphasize the character of their roles.

In the same way, these murals had to be cast and imagined from their beginning in a larger dimension than that of a pastel and cream magazine illustration. These murals are part of a school building. Although they are windows opened on infinity, they are also real walls of concrete and paint. They are put there to remind the students of what education is by way of knowing certain great personalities and activities, but they must do this in an architectural way. And so their design must be big and wide and broad as the outdoors. In fact, they are best seen from the side or at an angle, the way you would see them day by day at St. Mary's, and this is why the full-face, head-on kind of photograph may strike you at first as being too thick or too fat when they are only being functional and really suited to their purpose.



RIGHT: The unity of all races and peoples is shown by these three chanters. The ideal of the liturgy, Gregorian chants, and congregational singing is to bring all men together around the Altar. Everybody praying together, singing together, praising God together in the symphony of thanks that creation can give the God who made all men in his image and likeness; that is, the God who did not make the artist a special kind of man, but every man a special kind of artist—the theme of these paintings.



LEFT: St. Gregory the Great is shown with the Holy Ghost appearing to him in the form of a Dove (as he appeared at Christ's baptism). This was one way of emphasizing the great work of Church music still associated with this pope's name.

BELOW: Chaucer, who keeps popping in and out of English courses, is balanced at St. Mary's by the poetess St. Hilda of Whitby, a 7th century character (not shown here). In contrast to St. Gregory, whose everyday speech was Latin, Chaucer represents the development of English, our other mother tongue. The consecration of his genius to Mary is shown by the rosary he carries. Notice the extremely simple, architectural building up of his character; he is no isolated thing but part of a building in which what he worked for will be carried forward—the wedding of humanism and Christianity.

BELOW: Charlot is sketching a preliminary version of one panel. These cartoons (the original use of the word) are traced in the wet plaster or wet ground in order to give the artist some reference to his design and to guide him at close range in the actual achievement of a true mural.

