

JEAN CHARLOT

LIFE AND WORK

VOLUME 2: MEXICO, 1921 TO 1928

John Charlot

THIS DRAFT OF THE SECOND VOLUME OF A PROJECTED FOUR-VOLUME BIOGRAPHY OF JEAN CHARLOT IS PUBLISHED ON THE WEB IN ORDER TO ELICIT COMMENTS, CRITICISMS, AND CORRECTIONS. PLEASE ADDRESS THEM TO JOHN CHARLOT AT charlot@hawaii.edu.

© John Charlot 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgments

1. Historiographer

2. The Mexican Mural Renaissance

3. Mexicanidad: Study and Influence

4. Subject and Style

5. Religion and Romance

6. Jean Charlot's Mexican Transition

7. 1921–1922

8. 1923–1925

9. 1926–1928

Bibliography for volumes 1 and 2

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jean Charlot wrote extensively on this period and its protagonists, so a whole chapter was needed to assess his character as a source.¹ Readers of this volume should familiarize themselves with his major writings, such as *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920–1925* (1967), *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos, 1785–1915* (1962), and his essays collected in *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot* (Volume II, 1972). Though Charlot did not consider *The Mexican Mural Renaissance* autobiographical, he did deliberately delimited it to the years when he was a close observer:

Pues la parte central está dedicada al periodo 1920–1925...la época que mejor conozco por haberla vivido personalmente...cuando empezaron a pintar Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, Xavier Guerrero, etc. (September 14, 1945)
‘The central part is dedicated to the period 1920–1925...the period I know best for having lived it personally...when Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, Xavier Guerrero, etc., started to paint.’

More materials are available, many of which have never yet been used in the secondary literature. The most extensive and important is Charlot’s diaries, partially decoded from a European shorthand. He discussed the period in a number of interviews. Also valuable are Charlot’s many letters to Anita Brenner, full of points of personal and professional interest. I have been posting such previously unpublished materials on jeancharlot.org.

I have also discussed the writings left to us by other artists, writers, and companions of the time. Charlot used and translated manuscript materials of Siqueiros and other artists, and I have tried to connect them wherever possible to later publications. A full bibliographical study is necessary for Siqueiros himself. Beyond text problems, the history of the period is contentious:

Perhaps it is the development of art history in the twentieth century that has made artists anxious as they never were in earlier periods to claim the credit for initiating new styles and techniques, and nowhere has the battle for artistic precedence been waged with greater bitterness than in Mexico. (1964 Revolution on the Walls)

Problems of attribution and misdating have arisen in these controversies. Like other artists, Charlot gave away many of his works, especially drawings like his early street scenes and nudes of Luz Jiménez. Thus basic problems of identification and collection impede a thorough account of Charlot’s development and production. Finally, over cleaning has rendered the evaluation of many artworks doubtful.

In contrast to Volume 1 and despite the marginalization of Mexican art, the great number of secondary art historical sources challenge the writer on the subject. I have not tried to be exhaustive, citing major representatives of views over followers. I have favored primary over secondary sources, including the writings of the artists themselves and their contemporaries, a practice that has raised suspicion:

One encounters even in the most traditional art historical treatments of the Mexican School an intriguing dependence on the artists' own recording of the history and significance of their artwork. (Campbell 2003: 56)

Used critically, they are an almost unparalleled resource for the historian of a human movement. I tend also to favor the younger generations of scholars who are moving beyond the orthodoxies of their elders.

Working from Hawai'i has proved to be a handicap. The inter-library loan system of the university is weak in my areas, and Mexican institutions have been unresponsive. Major examples of the sources I have been unable to find or access are the letters Charlot mentions in his diary that he wrote to Diego Rivera and Fernando Leal when they were in conflict. Even the kind help of Fernando Leal Audirac has been of no avail. I am hoping readers of this draft will be prompted to offer their help.

Beyond all the above problems, the Mexican Mural Renaissance is a historiographical challenge in itself. An extraordinary number of genial and good artists of different fields interacted with great creativity and energy. How does one disentangle an individual from the group and follow his strand through the period?

Fortunately for the biographer, Charlot drove his own way through the period, influenced more by his own observations and ancient artworks than by his contemporaries. Not only was he self-directed, but early on the scene, joining a group of young artists who considered themselves free initiators rather than followers. Charlot himself saw his Mexican period as part of his life's pattern. Shortly before his death in 1979, he scrawled on a slip of paper:

Born and raised in Paris, having worked in Mexico both as an archeologist and a fresco muralist and now living in Hawaii, I have always looks [sic: looked] for the deep roots of the present day countries I lived in. I studied the native languages, *nahuatl* in Mexico, *hawaiian* in Hawaii, and [have] written and published in both languages.

Strongest influence in my paintings is the blood legacy of a great grandmother whose aztec ascendancy gave me a taste for so called primitive art that blends uniquely with the studies of classical art I did both at the Beaux Arts School and at the Louvre as befits a Paris born artist.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My special thanks to those who have commented on the whole text or provided a variety of information: my sister, Ann Marie Charlot de Mata Rojas, and Lewis Andrews. For particular assistance, I thank experts from whom I have learned much, especially Linda Downs, Tatiana Flores, Jane M. Walsh, and Caroline Klarr. I thank Susannah Glusker for copies of materials from the Anita Brenner papers, and Lewis Andrews for his valuable comments and appendix as well as for providing a relevant quotation from Charlot's letter to Edward Weston. Acknowledgments for particular points are expressed at the relevant place in the text.

I am grateful for help and general permissions to use materials in the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin (Anita Brenner and Merle Armitage correspondence); Yale University Press Records Concerning the Publication of Individual Titles (RU 168), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library (correspondence with the Yale University Press); the Walter Pach papers, the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution (Jean Charlot's letters to Walter Pach); The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (Jean Charlot's letter to Beaumont Newhall); the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace (Diego Rivera on Jean Charlot); and the Notre Dame Archives (a variety of materials).

All Spanish-language articles by Jean Charlot are in his *Escritos sobre Arte Mexicano* (1991–2000); all French-language articles in his *Textes Français* (2001); and all English in *English Texts*. All three are published on the Website of the Jean Charlot Foundation (JCF): jeancharlot.org. All Charlot's texts included in those two books will be referred to by title or abbreviation of title and date. Charlot collected clippings often with inadequate reference information. These will be cited by "Clippings" and whatever bibliographical information is available.

Most unpublished materials are in the Jean Charlot Collection (JCC), Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, unless otherwise noted. Biographical and other information is available on the JCC Website: <http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/charlot.html>. Readers should use search for unpaginated items. Translations in single quotation marks are mine; in double, by another translator. I have not corrected Charlot's texts but reproduce them as they appear. All quotations reproduce the originals except in minor cases in unpublished documents. I capitalize *revolution* when writing of the Mexican.

¹ The Foreword to Volume I contains much information that applies to this volume as well, and I will not repeat it here.