

DIEGO RIVERA ON RECORD IN SPANISH:
WHAT IS THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE ARTIST?

Diego Rivera
Translated by Stephen Buttes

Translator's Introduction

On November 20, 1956, Diego Rivera opened what would be the final solo exhibition of his life. He would die almost exactly a year later on November 24, 1957, following an eventful and, as the translated text below makes clear, intellectually and artistically productive final three-and-a-half years of his life. In July 1954, the painter Frida Kahlo, his third wife (whom he had divorced and remarried), passed away. The month before her death, Rivera had completed (in what is likely his final work of this sort) the first stage of a planned mural project to cover the exterior of the new University Stadium (later re-named Olympic Stadium for the 1968 Olympic Games).¹ And in the months following Kahlo's death through the end of 1955, a number a major events marked Rivera's life: he was re-admitted to the Mexican Communist Party; he learned that his cancer had returned; he would be invited to the Soviet Union to receive a prize; he would decide to seek a new cancer treatment (a cobalt-based radiation method not-then available in Mexico) while traveling in the Soviet Union; and he would announce that he married his fourth wife, Emma Hurtado, his longtime gallerist and business manager.²

Announcing in a press conference in August 1955 both his new marriage and the planned trip to the Soviet Union (for the joint purpose of receiving the award and receiving advanced medical care), Rivera and Hurtado left for Moscow. Rivera received the prize early in his trip and then spent approximately four months in the hospital receiving treatment. To celebrate his 69th birthday in December 1955, Hurtado planned a surprise birthday party for Rivera with the guests including the Soviet medical personnel; personnel from the Mexican embassy; Lily Brik, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky's widow; the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (who happened to be traveling in Moscow at the time); and the German writer Anna Seghers, who brought Rivera a birthday gift: a portable record player and records with Russian music. Throughout his time in Moscow and during his trip back to Mexico in early 1956—which included stops in Poland (to pay their respects at Auschwitz) and pre-Wall era Berlin (where they toured Hitler's bunker)—Rivera had been drawing, sketching, and

painting watercolors of the Soviet Union.

The above sequence of events and the social milieu involved in them led to the final exhibition in November 1956. They also led to the ideas Rivera expresses in the audio recording of the text that is translated below: his response to the perennial question, “what is the social role of the artist?” It appears to have been recorded at some point after his return to Mexico in 1956, and, following his death, it was released as an LP album: *Diego Rivera on Record in Spanish* published by Caedmon Records in the United States in 1958.³ All of the above issues—his illness and medical treatment with materials formerly used only to make weapons; his trip to the Soviet Union and travels through Europe, the United States, and Mexico; the development of modernity and technology; the successes and failures of the national and international left; his conversations with key artists on the international left; his conclusions regarding the role of art and artists in achieving egalitarian social relations; his own mixed record on these issues in his own circumstances—were weighing on him at the end of his life, and, without a doubt, they inform the answers he develops to the question.

That question is posed to Rivera by his daughter Ruth Rivera Marín, whose voice is the first we hear on the record. She was the youngest of his two daughters from his tumultuous marriage to his second wife, Guadalupe Marín. However, more important than her status as Rivera’s daughter, Rivera Marín was the first woman to receive a degree in Architecture and Engineering at the Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura. She would go on to found a journal of architecture and architectural theory (*Cuadernos de Arquitectura* [1961-1967]), to teach at the famous “La Esmeralda” School of Painting and Sculpture, to serve as the country’s Director of Architectural Preservation (*Dirección de Arquitectura y Conservación del Patrimonio Artístico Inmueble* [DACPAI]) at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), and to serve as a founding member of the Mexican Society for Urban Planning (*Sociedad Mexicana de Planificación*) among many other roles in government, universities, and cultural institutions.⁴ Importantly, she would also oversee the completion of Rivera’s architectural collaboration with the architect and painter Juan O’Gorman: the Museo Anahuacalli, which would house Rivera’s expansive collection of pre-Hispanic sculpture and was opened to the public in 1964. At various points throughout the conversation translated below, Rivera directly references Rivera Marín’s work as an architect, and it seems, at times, that he is reflecting on his own past artistic achievements, emergent from the post-revolutionary social milieu, in relation to the innovative works of architecture emerging in Mexico in the 1950s.

At its core, Rivera’s response to his daughter’s query expresses a concern with the classic questions that have motivated writing on art and aesthetics for centuries: What is art? Who can be considered an artist? Does art have a role

to play in a society that needs housing and that needs machinery to harvest food and produce fuel? Is art a necessary part of human existence or a decorative set of trifles and fleeting entertainment? Rivera takes up these questions in the context of his life and career and in the context of the political, economic, and social dynamics of the mid-1950s. Rivera's conclusions (particularly, his praise for the artistic, intellectual, and political traditions of the United States at the end of Side 1 and Side 2) may be surprising to readers less familiar with the nuances of his art and of his conceptualization of the relation between art and politics. In this way, the present text sheds light on the thinking of a major figure on the international left at a transition point in the development of the Cold War.

A Note to Readers on Translation Choices

As far as I am aware, this is the first translation into English of the full text of this record.⁵ To aid the reader in engaging Rivera's text as a written rather than spoken text, there are moments in the translation where I add a word, make a minor re-ordering of syntax, or make additional minor stylistic modifications. This is particularly the case in Rivera's lengthy clauses where it is easy to lose the subject of the sentence or the referent being described. In these cases, Rivera is usually setting up a complex comma series of clauses as a strategy for linking historically concrete examples across a range of artistic production in support of his idea or assertion, one that usually seeks to both maintain and transcend their specificity in an effort to unify them. In some cases, Rivera will break his sentence in order to add an aside that provides additional contextual information, a caveat, or a specific definition that further develops his idea or assertion. I often add a repeat of the referent at some point in the series of clauses to keep Rivera's analysis in focus for the reader. Having noted these minor modifications, the goal of the translation is to maintain and present in as unmodified a way as possible the structure and flow of the text as Rivera created it: as a spoken response to a question posed by his daughter and intellectual collaborator.

In addition to the minor modifications to syntax and style, there are several translation decisions that merit specific mention at the outset. First, Rivera often uses the convention of speaking about "el hombre" or "los hombres" when referring to all human beings. There are also times when he uses "el ser humano," "los seres humanos," or "la humanidad." In general, the translation below does not reproduce Rivera's varied use of "el hombre" and "el ser humano," which are deployed as synonyms. Instead, the translation opts to use in all these instances "humans" or "human beings." In a similar vein, this translation uses the plural "artists" in places where Rivera speaks conceptually of "el artista" so as to use the plural pronoun and avoid the need to use multiple singular

pronouns and possessive adjectives (i.e., “their” and “them” instead of “his or her” and “her or him”). In places where gendered language is necessary for the point Rivera is making (e.g., his discussion of cave painting towards the beginning; his contrastive reading of Titian and Tintoretto towards the end), the gender-distinctive language has been maintained.

Aside from these translation choices concerned with rendering Rivera’s conceptual arguments clearly and accurately, there are several words that Rivera utilizes repeatedly throughout the text as part of his analysis: “genio” or “el genio;” “imaginación;” “progreso” or “progresista;” “maravilloso;” and “vida” or “vivir.” When translating “genio,” I have generally opted for “innovative capacity,” “innovative achievement,” or “creative innovation” instead of the more literal (and, in English, more confusing) “genius.” Similarly, “imaginación” has been translated as “creativity” or “capacity for creativity” instead of the more literal “imagination.” The same holds true for “progreso” or “progresista,” which I translate as “egalitarianism,” “equality,” or “egalitarian,” which I understand as a better expression of Rivera’s view in English than the more ambiguous “progress” or “progressive.” These choices are aimed at communicating in English what I take to be the point of the descriptions and distinctions Rivera makes in his analysis. Paralleling this approach for non-literal translation (or translation based on what I argue is his meaning), I introduce variability in my translation of “maravilloso” and “vida”/“vivir.” With the former, I do not believe Rivera has a precise set of qualities in mind when using that adjective and thus opt to utilize “superb,” “wondrous,” “stunning,” “magnificent” and similar words, seeking to pair the best English-language option with the valence of description Rivera is highlighting when using that single word (“maravilloso”) across his descriptions of persons and painters, cities, works of art and so on. When Rivera uses “vida” or “vivir,” it is clear that sometimes he means something like “ways of life” or “lifeways” (i.e., the reproduction of social life) while at other times he is referencing the ability for life to continue on into the future, as in “survival” or “surviving.” I have made choices in the translation with these distinct meanings in mind. There are additional, non-repeated examples of these kinds of translation dilemmas throughout the text. I have sought to highlight and clarify these moments by placing the original Spanish-language word or phrase in *italics* in brackets following my translation choice.

As a final note, I have indicated in **bolded, bracketed text** the points where there are clear and audible breaks in the recording. These include, for example, the break between side 1 and side 2 of the record. Another example are points where the recording was stopped and incompletely recorded over (i.e., one word from whatever was recorded over remains on the final recording). Additionally, there is a notably long pause toward the end where it seems that Rivera is being (silently) directed to create some sort of conclusion to this text. While those cuts do not affect the meaning of Rivera’s ideas and assertions,

I have maintained them so that the status of this text as a spoken exchange between him and his daughter is maintained and also so that this translation maintains the expression of her role in the directed creation of what we hear (i.e., her operation of the machine, her decisions on where to cut, her decisions on when to re-record, etc.). It is possible to read those decisions as instances of her editorial work, which she would put into practice in the influential architectural journal she would go on to edit. Part of what makes this text compelling is the sense that what we are hearing is an outgrowth of more extemporaneous conversations they likely had about these issues as Rivera Marín gained influence and importance in architectural circles in Mexico. In the catalogue for *Diego Rivera y la experiencia en la URSS* (2017), there is mention of ample letters and correspondence between Rivera and Rivera Marín during his trip to Moscow in 1955. In the translation below we have a version of these sorts of exchanges created for a public audience, and we have a text where we can see Diego Rivera closing the book on his work as Ruth Rivera Marín is establishing herself as a growing intellectual force in her own right.

Diego Rivera on Record in Spanish:
What is the Social Role of the Artist?

Side 1

Ruth Rivera Marín: Dad, some architects, my colleagues at work, and some younger artists are interested in knowing your opinion about what the social role of the artist is.

Diego Rivera: Very well. In order to provide them with my opinion regarding the social role of the artist, it is necessary for us to understand first—or, if not understand, at least for me to tell you—with absolute clarity, what it is I understand when I say “art” and what it is I understand when I say “artist.”⁶ There have been many ways of defining what this act is—philosophical definitions, literary, poetic, and political ones—but none of them would give us a definition of art with complete precision. We need, before proceeding, to establish what art is, fundamentally, as a biological phenomenon, as a physiological phenomenon, and, consequently, as a social and political phenomenon.

We have absolutely nothing from which we can know the remote past of human beings (or, for that matter, human societies more generally) in the form of works of art that have been left to us as traces of those human beings’ passage across the Earth. There are no other objects [*ningún otro elemento*] available for that kind of analysis aside from some tools of work, which, generally speaking, are very rudimentary.

However, whenever we look further and further back in time, we find whatever traces humans left behind to be more and more admirable. There is nothing more perfect, nothing more gripping [*fuerte*], nothing more realist, nothing more poetic, nothing more astutely observed, nothing better utilized in its execution as a work of art than the materials utilized in the creation of cave paintings, which some writers say date back to the Ice Age.

In those paintings, man achieved in actuality—what I mean to say is, human beings, given that all evidence indicates that those who created them [the cave paintings] were either women or beings who participated in the qualities of both genders—humanity in that period achieved the peak of its capacity for innovation [*genio*]. From then on, the medium of expression has varied, but the quality of that expression has not varied. A quality expressive of innovative capacity [*la calidad genial*].⁷

There is nothing comparable to—I do not mean to say better than, but instead that nothing is even comparable with the artistic quality of, with the realist quality of—works of art from the period of cave painting. The best artists—such as my esteemed and admired [*mi maestro*] Picasso, my esteemed and admired Posada, my esteemed and admired Velasco⁸—cannot be com-

pared with the expression—above all with the dynamic expression of life in movement—in those cave paintings. Perhaps the only one could be Picasso. But, then again, he does not achieve the vitality nor the spontaneity of those paintings, in spite of the fact that he is the most innovative [*el más genial*] artist living and working today.

So, given that you are asking me about the social role of the artist, we can propose something that can be called a hypothesis, but one that is based on concrete, specific facts [*hechos precisos*]. It is without a doubt true that in the earliest periods of human society that life was significantly less stratified along class lines than contemporary society. Human beings in those early periods had to be skilled at living at the same level as others or they perished. It was not viable.⁹ As a result, they had to have their observational abilities [*el ojo*] sufficiently developed in order to perceive the forms, movements, and ways of living put into practice by animals without whose sacrifice, without whose killing, it was impossible for human beings to survive, given that humans fed themselves from the flesh of animals, dressed themselves in the skins of animals, made their tools of work and their adornments from the bones of animals (aside from using wood and stone). In this way, those societies of nomadic hunter-gatherers, who walked from the South Pole to almost the North Pole, had to have a tremendous capability for living and their societies could not be stratified in complicated ways as later societies were.

We can almost say that it is undoubtedly the case that those who made the cave paintings belonged to a society that was not divided into classes. As a result, we can conclude that—given that as soon as societies divided along class lines that those who have exercised power have always attempted to control the production of art so as to make it serve their interests and to consolidate their power—the perfection of the paintings that preceded the division of society into classes owes their perfection precisely to the fact that they were produced in a society that was not divided into classes. As a result, if at some point—and it is certain that it will probably be soon—the world can live in societies that are no longer divided into classes, the perfection of the first artworks will, first, be matched and then surpassed (assuming that we possess more complete mediums of expression).

Now then, what, conceptually, is art?¹⁰ Why is it that, since human beings took their first steps, the work of art serves as witness to their passage across the Earth?

It has been said that the work of art is a manifestation of superstructure. One philosopher has called it “the banquet of civilization.”¹¹ Another philosopher has called it the “splendor of truth,”¹² what lays beyond the “splendor of the good.” In truth, it could be all of this. None of it is precluded. It depends on each person’s viewpoint [*opinión*]. But, what the work of art actually is in reality is an agent. The work of art is an agent capable of producing determinate,

perfectly precise physiological sensations, which is to say, glandular secretions: notably, from the suprarenal gland, which provides human organisms with materials that are as necessary for sustaining human life [*tan necesarios para la vida humana*] as the materials that the digestive tract extracts from the food taken in through the process of ingesting, chewing, digesting, etc. In this way, art, in reality, is a vital necessity for human beings.

Afterward all the other aspects of art can follow, but in its essence [*esencialmente*] art is a necessity. For this reason, the work of art is useful to the life of human beings to the same extent that hunting is useful to the life of human beings (for providing meat they can eat, for providing them skins they can use to clothe themselves) or to the same extent that crops are useful to human beings (for providing them the maize or wheat they use to make their bread, for providing them vegetables, fruit, and all the rest). The work of art is an aspect of life that is a primary necessity.

Building on this, the esteemed [*el maestro*] Marx—from the first lines of his book, *Capital*, which is a critique of political economy—asserts that a commodity is everything that is useful to the life of human beings. It makes no difference if that utility is one concerned with the digestive tract or with the capacity for creativity [*la imaginación*].

Now then, the truth of the matter is that, with the work of art, the same issues are at play as those involved in one's diet: as with the process of digestion so with the process of creativity [*la imaginación*].

Consequently, the work of art is an extraordinarily important commodity. For that reason, a commenter on Marx's work, an English philosopher, glosses that assertion with the following: "it is precisely those commodities involving creativity [*la imaginación*] that cost us the most."¹³

And this is clear. If you buy a book of poetry, what are you paying for? Are you paying for the paper the poetry is printed on? The cost of its binding? The chosen weight of paper? The potential use of that paper for something other than reading? Surely not. Because there are kinds of paper better conditioned for and more useful for those other activities [*funciones*].

So, if what you buy at the bookstore is not the paper and is not the materials that comprise the book, what is it that you have bought and what is it that you have paid for?

You have bought poetry and paid for poetry.

If you buy a ticket to a concert put on by one of the top symphony orchestras, and pay more than what you would have to pay were you to simply buy a meal at breakfast or at dinner, what are you buying? Are you buying a seat where you can take a rest? Are you buying the privilege to show off an evening gown? The privilege to meet up with friends? Or, are you buying music?

You are buying a work of art.

You are buying a commodity that exists only in the successive sounds produced by a group of people operating their instruments, an operation for which they receive a generally low salary when compared with the level of effort and skill required to do it. This is to say that the act of creating music —whatever kind of music it may be (the same is true for religious music and for secular music)— the act of creating music entails a mode of industrial organization, a mode of commercial organization to provide to you and to the rest of the audience a commodity that is necessary for sustaining human life [*una mercancía necesaria para la vida humana*].

The same thing happens with sculpture. The same thing happens with painting. What you are paying for is not the price of stone or the price of bronze. You pay for that. But in addition to it, you pay for that which is neither the quality nor the value of the metal or the stone.

Thus, what you are paying for is the quantity of a capacity for feeling [*sensibilidad*], the quantity of creativity [*imaginación*], the quantity (eventually) of innovative achievement [*genio*], the labor accumulated by the artist to execute the work.

That is, you are paying for art: because you need it, and the rest of society needs it for their survival [*para su vida*]. Were it not so, you wouldn't buy it. You wouldn't pay for it.

Now then, let's turn to your profession, to architecture. Architecture is precisely the clearest example of what I am arguing.

A house, a dwelling: whether it is an estate, a stand-alone home in a neighborhood, an apartment building: it is not there to be looked at but rather to be lived in.

A factory is not for beholding [*no es para contemplarla*]. It is for a certain quantity of machinery and equipment to be operated by a certain number of human beings in the production of a specific commodity. And all of that is beneficial [*propicio*]. All of that is the work of the architect.

But, if dwelling is the only thing that can be done inside a house; if machine operation and commodity production are the only things that can be done inside a factory, it will not be fully useful [*totalmente funcional*].¹⁴ Because when it comes to workers laboring in the factory as well as those who are not workers (both workers and capitalists are in the same situation), they are presented with the same needs for their nervous system, whether they are inside of the house or outside of it. Consequently, if what is surrounding them is not capable of producing within them what we can call aesthetic feeling [*emoción estética*] —the only agent capable of prompting the glands to operate and produce needed secretions (secretions that are as necessary, I repeat, as the phenomenon of digestion for sustaining human life)— your architecture will not be complete nor much less useful [*funcional*].

With this in mind now, we can go on to consider what is built—and it is something that is built often—to consider the construction of the *huacal*.¹⁵ A *huacal* is a building-frame-like crate that Mexico's peasant farmers [*campesinos*] carry on their backs. A *huacal* can be made from steel or from concrete; one can cover the exterior with glass or with bricks, all of which could be done without, in those scenarios, having ended up with the creation of works of architecture.

When it comes to human dwellings, architecture begins when the capacity for that structure to produce a feeling [*emoción*] of beauty begins. And only in that situation can we speak of a functionalist or useful architecture [*arquitectura funcional*].¹⁶

In this sense, industrial architecture in our contemporary moment has more significant requirements than architecture that is not so-called industrial architecture, which, truth be told, is merely commercial architecture, given that it is oriented towards the uses of whoever dwells within it, whether that be the person who built it or the person who rents it, in the case that it is rented out.

So yes, what industrial architecture has is the absolutely precise and necessary components for its effective operation. It must have the required capacity for air flow, the necessary quantity of light (whether artificial or natural), the necessary space for machinery and a... and the requirements that enable the efficient operation of a machine, which is the precise use of a material, in the correct amount, in a precise process for producing a specific object with predetermined specifications. They are exactly the same kinds of requirements that were considered in the production of Mayan sculpture, in the production of primitive Greek sculpture, or in the production of sculpture from the traditions of ancient China and India.

In other words, the laws, the universal laws that organize the operation of machinery —and, consequently, industrial architecture— are the same laws that organize the production of the work of art.

For that reason now, those of us who possess a certain quantity of the capacity for feeling [*sensibilidad*], we prefer one thousand times over (as architects) to view vertical, cylindrical warehouses for storing wheat, to see a high-quality industrial plant for the extraction of cottonseed oil, to take in a well-constructed foundry, to 99.5% of what is built today with aesthetic ambition by those who call themselves architects but who do not possess what is essential for practicing that profession, which is, namely, a capacity for feeling [*sensibilidad*] and artistic talent [*talento plástico*].

Such is the case today in Mexico City, to an extreme and lamentable degree.

Mexico City could have been made a magnificent city... What has been achieved, in a marvelously rushed way, with growth proceeding at a speed without precedent, is the ugliest city in the world [*la ciudad más horrible del*

mundo], due to the lack of organization, due to the lack of aesthetic awareness on the part of its builders.

Naturally, there are exceptions. There are beginning to be numerous exceptions. And now that I have been able to see some of the buildings your counterparts —people your age— have built outside the capital, I have found that they are one hundred times or one thousand times superior to those built in Mexico City by individuals working with unwarranted acclaim: heirs, physically the offspring, of terrible architects of the academic tradition who continue being as academic as before, without doing anything other than substituting the pattern or the model (which previously was drawn from the worst French academicians) with a different pattern drawn from the worst of the French academicians today, Le Corbusier.

In this way, we concluded that the work of art is not merely ornamental or decorative. The work of art is a product of a society's superstructure, but at the same time, it is also a product of its base.

That is, the work of art has for a social organism a role that parallels that of blood. It is made to flow by the operation of the heart, by the operation of the myocardium, but it circulates the entirety of the human organism, from the feet all the way to the cells of the brain. In those cells, in the cerebral cortex, there is the superstructure, in the cerebellum. The other parts are the base. But nothing is possible without the circulation of blood. So too is the case with art. Art is undoubtedly something that operates via circulation. The simile with the circulation of blood is rather accurate.

But it is not sufficient. This is because, in addition to having a role paralleling that of the circulation of blood, art also has another role in society, which involves its role in the circulating functions of the nervous system, its role in sustaining the circulation of the substances that make the operations of the nervous system possible, which relates to the speed at which transmissions in the nervous system take place as well as the other phenomena. In this way, art is an essential activity for sustaining human life, as essential as one's diet, as essential as commodities, as important as wheat, as meat, as grains, as vegetables, as fruit. It is essential for sustaining human life [*para la vida del hombre*].

Now, if art is an essential activity for sustaining human life, what is the role of the artist? The answer to the question you have asked me is perfectly clear: the role of the artist in society, biologically, is a role linked with providing, the role of providing necessary nourishment [*es un papel de nutridor, proporcionar de alimentos*].

Just as peasant farmers [*el campesino*] provide food for the digestive tract, as do ranchers [*el ganadero*] and as do vegetable producers [*horticultor*], the artist provides nourishment for the nervous system. Consequently, the artist is a humble worker, and that humility provides the artist with greatness, the greatness that is the essence of the peasant farmer, the flower producer, the

vegetable producer, the chemist, the doctor: the artist is an essential worker in the social organism. The artist's work is not ornamental or decorative.

The quality of being decorative or ornamental, the quality of being the dessert course at the banquet of civilization—which is where they have attempted to relegate art—is a product of class interests, those of the individuals or groups who exploit the working-class majority. And they attempt to make art appear as something that is not tangible, as something that is completely in the realm of the rich, of those who possess wealth—who are thought to be the only ones capable of understanding it, the only ones capable of buying and paying for it—and they produce in the masses a relation to art characterized by an admiration for what they cannot possess.

In truth, however, art is not and cannot be a luxury for the few given that it is an essential activity for sustaining human life. Just as not everyone is a great orator but all people have the capacity for speech or for communicating with others and know how to use words, so too do all human beings, so too can all human beings express themselves through form, through the use of color, through the use of space, through the use of sound. If anyone doubts this, they need only look at the drawings created by children in schools the world over.

When children are still free from the warped and misshapen impositions of teachers—because schools throughout the world (with the exception of schools in the socialist bloc) are nothing other than places for warping and misshaping human life so as to orient it toward being easier to exploit—before teachers are able to warp and misshape their abilities, all children the world over have a talent for painting. All children throughout the world have talent for creating shapes and making sculptures. All children the world over have musical talent and all of them have a talent for poetry.

Thus, we can and should affirm that art is a human language. It is a medium of expression, and it is, in general, a property embedded in every being that forms a part of human societies.

The division of labor imposed by capitalism is what prevents the generalized development of these abilities.

For that reason, we can conclude, once again, as we were indicating at the outset, that in a society that is better organized, that is more just—a classless society—art will reach undreamed of heights. It is only in that way that this new society will be able to surpass the one created by humanity when it was still in nonexistence and human beings lived within classes.¹⁷

And the role of the artist. Well then, being a provider of necessary nourishment for the nervous system, the artist can follow the path of the producer of milk or the path of the producer of wine. The artist can provide, the artist can sell a product that promises nourishment: the product can sustain public health and the product can intoxicate the public. The artist can play a positive or a negative role.

Those who possess power —whether an individual or a group or a social class— invariably seek to secure control of the artist in the same way that they seek to secure control of the baker, seek to secure control of meat producers, seek to secure control of dairy workers in order to align their products with their own class interests and within the exploitation of workers by those who rule. As a result, they attempt to have art reflect a quality that is helpful to them.

We only need to glance at the historical record to see this.

Athens. Art leaves behind the period of cave painting. Immediately art emerges to serve either the interests of religion—referring here to the gods and mythological figures who have served to deceive the masses and maintain falsehoods that make their exploitation easier—or the interests of bosses: referring here to kings, chiefs, generals and all other individuals who have ruled and have exploited the majority. Here there are not exceptions.¹⁸ Exceptions only begin to emerge when the majority rebels. Then the people produce artists who are allied with them. These are those we can call revolutionary artists.

A representative example of these sorts of artists comes from the Middle Ages. Towards the end of that period, the great Giotto, and, more into the modern period, the superb painter Brueghel.¹⁹

In this vein, when a society is cohesive and unified, when there is a general consensus that has been well established—a phenomenon that especially occurs in the militarized theocracies of the ancient Americas—then art is significantly more unified. It has the quality—that quality your architect-colleagues now seek—of artistic unity [*integración de la plástica*]. Because, with the existence of widely-accepted views—when there is a generalized way of feeling [*una manera de sentir general*—then the whole of the people is productive of the work of art. And it becomes impossible to demarcate, as in the extraordinary... in the extraordinary art of Pre-Hispanic America: it is impossible to draw a clear line establishing where astronomy ends and engineering begins, where engineering ends and architecture begins and where architecture reaches its border with sculpture and with painting. It is a complete, unified whole [*un todo*], because it was a complete, unified whole: a society.²⁰

Additionally, without a doubt, when we eventually achieve a classless society, art will possess those characteristics. Because education will no longer be a factory for producing citizens who are obedient to the state's use of force [*obedientes al gendarme*] and who pay their unjust taxes so as to shoulder the cost of wars and other disastrous actions, but instead it will be a society of human beings who are aware of their rights and their responsibilities and thus live in harmony among themselves and with all others across the Earth. In a classless society, all the power of innovation [*la potencia genial*] and all the expressive power of works of art to produce beauty will be recovered and restored to their maximum capacity.

When artists allow themselves to be ruled by the exploiting classes, naturally their artworks take on the qualities of those exploiting classes. Sometimes the exploiting classes manage to bring the artist into their direct service. They manage to direct the innovative capacities [*genio*] of Velázquez toward painting princesses, toward painting kings on horseback and towards painting buffoons on foot.²¹ They manage to direct the innovative capacities [*genio*] of Rubens toward the role of a queen's ambassador (not to mention her lover) and toward gaining advantages for her kingdom.²² They manage to make the artist a servant.

Today, the ruling bourgeois class no longer manages to achieve such a thing. They no longer manage to do it. Today the whole world over, there are no artists who are so submissive and so abject, so obsequious and so servile, so wretched and so despicable that they paint into their works the praises of capitalism. Were we to search the world over for such artists, we would search in vain. We would not find them even in the areas surrounding Wall Street.

When the Rockefellers—unhappy, as is well known, with the fresco I had painted²³—when they searched for a U.S. artist to paint a work in the place of mine, not a single U.S. artist—not old, not young, not conservative, not liberal, not revolutionary, not academic, not abstract, not concrete—presented... presented themselves to betray, to betray their national heritage, the heritage handed down from Jefferson, the heritage handed down from Lincoln, the heritage handed down from John Brown and Walt Whitman and Frank Lloyd Wright to deny what was evident to everyone. Not for all the money on Wall Street did anyone deign to paint falsehoods in the place where I had imprinted the truth in Rockefeller Center.

It could not have been otherwise, given the essential qualities of the people of the United States, their historical qualities, and given that artists are always an expression of the people among whom they work.

Side 2

Rivera: So, what has capitalism managed to do? Capitalism has managed—since it wasn't able to buy and control what we say [*la nuestra palabra*—capitalism has managed to buy the silence of some of us. Art that represents nothing. Poetry that says nothing. Inconsequential comedies, as some politely call them.

What is it that these are?

They are commodities that do not produce dyspepsia in the bourgeois patron who pays for them, and they do not stir poorly-paid workers to fight against their low pay. This is to say, they are examples of a commodity perfectly equivalent to morphine, to cocaine, to opiates when they are used in a way that produces, first, relief from pain, and, later, addiction.

In this context, artists who contribute their labor power [*potencialidad de producción*] and their ability to create beauty to this state of affairs, what are they? What is their role in society? It is precisely that of the narcotics trafficker [*un traficante en drogas heroicas*]. It is the role of a despicable criminal. They are poisoners of the public.

The role of artists allied with the people are those who work to express with precision the truth of the society in which they live. They tell of the beauty of the wondrous world that surrounds them and are in direct communication with the masses in the society, working on the side of justice, on the side of egalitarianism [*progreso*]. These artists have a role that is completely positive, just as those others have a role that is completely negative.

Such is the role of the artist today: either a producer of things that weaken or anesthetize, or, a producer of things that feed and nourish the movement toward the equality of all human beings [*el progreso humano*]. There is no in-between.

Does this mean that every work of art must be an active call to insurrection? Does that mean that every work of art must, invariably, be a work directly agitating for activism [*una obra de agitación*]?

No.

There was one occasion, in the largest of the socialist countries, where my friends and I put this question directly to the workers. And the workers responded: “what we want in our factories”—this is written down in a historic resolution, written and directed to October [*Oktyabr*], the group of Soviet artists of which I had the great honor of forming part²⁴—the resolution says: “what we want in our factories, on the walls of our factories, on the walls of our clubs, on the walls of our schools, on the walls of all of our public buildings, on interior walls and exterior walls, are paintings that remind us of the struggle to win our rights, and the... and the benefits of having won them [*la posesión de ellos*]. As with the struggle, so with the challenges of reaching the summit

and the noble, durable results. But when it comes to our interior, to our houses, our homes, the place where we go, exhausted, after a hard-day's work with the desire to rest and recuperate, there we want paintings that give us the rest that we need, such as those that all of you"—they were addressing a group of artists, among whom I was included—"such as those that all of you call landscapes or still lifes, which call to mind the products and foods that delight us but that we do not always have. We do not have the same season all year long, and they remind us in winter of what is promised to us in spring, what the autumn will bring. And they also place before our very eyes the far-flung places of the world to which we do not have access except during our vacation time, given that we must work in an industry that is where it is because of its relation to [*según*] what the soil will produce. For that reason, we want landscapes and still lifes."

It could come to be, insofar as the role of the artist in society is an important role, an essential role, insofar as, I reiterate, it is oriented toward the general interests of society, and insofar as it plays a positive role. However, if allied with the interests of classes that exploit the classes who sustain the base of society, that role will be a negative one.

Can there be, can there exist a third position for the artist?

What might that be?

Perhaps it would be one limited to producing landscapes and still lifes.

All of you will respond: of course, in a situation like that, art will be useful to one group and also to the other. If painters were to paint only landscapes and still lifes and never painted political paintings, the ruling class [*la burguesía*] would never be disturbed or unsettled. No one is frightened by a pile of apples or by a plate filled with pastries or by a well-painted lambchop. They please the rich just as much as they please the poor, those who are exploited just as much as those who exploit.

However, what would the situation be for a person focused on producing only landscapes and still lifes? Well, they cannot escape the qualities embedded within them [*el carácter que tengan*]. Someone who is willing to serve the ruling class [*los explotadores*] will not look at the Earth's available landscapes [*los paisajes que hay en la tierra*] in the same way as someone willing to aid, as someone willing to be an ally of the exploited and who seeks to cease serving those who exploit.

In this way, even a landscape, even a still life has specific qualities embedded within them. They might be directed toward egalitarian ends [*ser progresista*] or they might not. There is no in-between.

But does this mean all art should be propaganda? Or should it not? Every work of art is propaganda: absolutely every work. It's true of paintings of Venetian canals that draw tourists and romantic couples to Venice to the benefit of hotel owners and shopkeepers just as it's true of religious paintings or political paintings. The only difference is the orientation of the propaganda.

A work of abstract art is also propaganda: propaganda for turning away from reality, propaganda for enjoying pure form and pure color, propaganda for not concerning oneself with problems outside form and color. In other words, propaganda for escapism.

So, there is no third position. Those who claim to take a third position are little more than opportunists. Such is the role of the artist in society.

[long pause]

Yes, we can say we have a clear understanding of the social role of the artist. We can now attempt to elaborate just why we are seeking to lay it out so precisely.

To do so, the only available strategy is that of observation and analysis. In other words, to take a look at the artistic production that is being created across the world in the contemporary moment as well as what has previously been created in different historical sequences [*diferentes estados históricos*] in society. That is the only thing that will enable us to demonstrate that what we have laid out is true; or, to see that it is not true, that we are mistaken [*hemos mentido*].

So, let us see.

We are going to analyze historical periods that are very familiar to us so as to avoid questions or doubts.

For example, let's look at the period in which Spain and its imperial allies organized under the reign of Charles I [*Carlos V*] were waging war against... against the Flemish, against the Dutch, with the goal of ruling them. And we can examine the art produced in that period.

It is precisely in this period that the inimitable artist Brueghel appears.

What is it that makes up the paintings in Brueghel's work?

Brueghel's paintings are stunning landscapes. They are the stage sets for the life he painted. No one before him painted the plains, painted the valleys, painted the mountains as he did: in the winter, in the spring, in the summer, in the autumn. Every bit of life on Earth. And they were peopled with figures who also accurately represented—given that his landscapes included cities—the lifeways of humanity in his time.

He extended the landscape beyond his mere surrounding realities. In those landscapes, he moved the mountains separating his country from the country of those invading. He went still further: going into history and painting a landscape that included the Tower of Babel.²⁵ That is, he painted the root of all those differences that led to war in his time: differences of language, racial differences, and all those differences that organized what he, in his era, could know as life. History [in his paintings] is sacred history. Indeed, what he paint

ed was from within sacred history, spanning from that mythological period of humanity until his present-day surroundings.

And what were his present-day surroundings?

Towns razed by fire; cities that had been sacked; murdered men, women, and children; the execution of those who defended their country. It was injustice that surrounded him. He was surrounded by the heroism of his compatriots defending themselves against the Spanish invader.

Could he paint any of those events directly? He would have suffered repression.

So, seeking to evade that repression, and, nevertheless, continuing to represent the truth, he incorporated scenes of what was surrounding him into the sacred history of the Old and New Testament. In this way, the invader, who claimed to profess the Catholic faith, could not constrain him from painting what he saw because they could not deny the truth of the Gospel. Given that [in the Gospel] there was the Massacre of the Innocents, which has been ordered by Herod, he painted the massacre of civilians [*inocentes*] and a small figure of Herod.

It was perfect, [*audio cut*] Oppressed. [*audio cut*] the substituting of Herod for Charles I [*Carlos V*], for the Duke of Alba, for whatever other Herod was engaged in oppression. And he painted with precision the massacres he had seen with his own eyes: the razing of villages by fire, the rapes and other acts of violence.

He incorporated the heroic national defenders into scenes of those crucified along with Christ, executed along with Christ. With ease the people were able to incorporate their defenders into these scenes of execution: the just men who were fighting for them.

He painted the storm. He painted naval battles. He painted the emperor at the head of his troops as they traversed the mountains in preparation for their invasion of the Netherlands. He painted battles between armies under the pretext of Saul's passage into sacred history.

And before Brueghel, Giotto had done the same in Italy.

Giotto in Italy had painted the life of Saint Francis of Assisi:²⁶ a brother to the poor, a brother to the water, a brother to the sun. The wondrous Francis: a brother to everything and everyone, one who loved everything and everyone and one who, naturally, called out and criticized those who did not love their neighbor but instead exploited them.

The frescoes Giotto painted are also a precise translation of the life of the world that surrounded him. He took as a supreme example the life of Saint Francis as a path to critique not only the emperor, not only the Italian nobility, but also the Pope himself. The Pope, who sometimes forgot his mission to serve as a shepherd and instead took on the position of a rich land owner, a farm operator [*rico granjero*] whose landed status led him to act as a powerful lord

oriented by temporal power. Just as Dante placed some Popes in the hell of his *Inferno*,²⁷ so too did Giotto know how to show them walking the path to hell when they failed to meet their responsibilities and live up to their mission.

And in later periods, during the bourgeois revolutions for democracy, what do we find in the work of art?

We find a distinguished group of poets who were guiding the people to freedom, to the creation of a class oriented toward egalitarian ends [*progresista*], which Marx called the strongest in all of history: the bourgeoisie. This was one hundred years ago.²⁸

And what did that class produce? Well, it produced Beethoven. It produced a whole series of poets: Schiller, for one. It produced André Chénier. It also produced the painter David. And the enormously important, the influential painters Honoré Daumier and Gustave Courbet.²⁹

Honoré Daumier at the same time that he brutally critiqued—to the point of its destruction—the corrupt legal order of his era, he also came to know what it was to take up arms and fight in the barricades. He came to know what it was to defend the rights of the people, the democratic rights of the people by going to prison, a place from which he produced some of his masterworks.

In later years, Courbet produced masterworks as well. And Courbet came to know what it was to sit among the members of the Central Committee that announced freedom to the world with the name of the Paris Commune. And he also came to know exile. He also came to know the suffering of imprisonment. And he also had to come to know what it was to enter combat. And he remains today in one of the primary galleries of the Louvre Museum, as does Daumier, as one of the greatest examples of humanity's capacity for innovation [*genio*].³⁰

There is no one who surpasses Courbet. There are those who are his equals. There is, of course, Cézanne.³¹ Seurat. Seurat: a wise student of physics, a revolutionary. There is Pissarro, the revolutionary socialist. There is Cézanne, who supported every popular struggle for democracy. And so on and so on.³²

In truth, during historical eras in which there are significant advances toward egalitarianism [*progreso*], toward true freedom, toward true democracy, all great artists have been on the side of the people.

Today, in our own challenging era, in this era of intolerance in countries like the United States and other countries under its influence—where anyone who does not view things in accordance with Mr. McCarthy becomes the object of persecution³³—in all these countries, there is a single artist who has made mountains of money and who can, in spite of his political views, continue making it. The intolerance of the bourgeoisie has given way to a tolerance for this artist so as to acquire his paintings because they are the ones that hold the greatest monetary value, have the highest level of prestige, and are of the highest quality in the world today. And that painter, that man of innovative

creativity [*genio*] whose work spans an entire period of art history, which is from the last third of the nineteenth century through the present decade of the twentieth, is named Pablo Picasso: a magnificent painter and a regular, dues-paying member of the French Communist Party.

That latter characteristic would prevent him from visiting Mr. McCarthy or President Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. The law prevents it. However, each of Picasso's works that enters the United States is a coveted item that, despite his membership in the Communist Party, leads to no hesitation from museums, galleries, and collectors to pay many thousands of dollars to acquire one of those works given their status as art of the highest caliber.

This situation is absolute proof that art is a necessity, a human necessity that transcends ephemeral circumstances. Mr. McCarthy is completely ephemeral. Every president of the Republic is as well. They usually last eight or ten [eighteen?] years in power. The people become disgruntled if they attempt to go on to twelve or more [*si pretenden durar más de doce*].³⁴

Now, works by Picasso, on the other hand, will last for centuries (assuming atomic bombs do not destroy them).

Picasso, for his part, is a soldier for peace. He does not want atomic bombs to bring art to an end. Above all, he does not want atomic bombs to bring human solidarity to an end. He does not want them to bring humanity to an end. He does not want men, women, and children—innocent non-combatants—to die because those who are in power have decided to wage war. Picasso is a soldier for peace.

His role, such as it is, is magnificently consequential. He has recently published what is likely the most important book of drawings of all time.³⁵ It is a book focused on peace. It contains all of the studies and sketches Picasso drew in preparation for two of his greatest masterworks: one is *Peace*; the other *War*.³⁶

With the material used to put together this composite production—those two masterworks and the ephemeral materials that often themselves constitute masterworks, such as the sketches that are included—he has managed to publish the most consequential book advocating for peace.

Adding to this, all of you can consider a case from the Middle Ages: there was a painter, an angelic, seraphic painter, a painter-mystic, a superb painter by trade who seemed to pray as he was painting, the painter of *The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins* (1489), which is a panel on *The Shrine of Saint Ursula* located in the Saint John Hospital in Bruges. This painter,³⁷ in spite of having the needed keen eye for detail work (a typically feminine quality), he was at the same time a captain of the military's archers in Bruges. Just as he was able to utilize the paintbrush to achieve his aim in miniature—the shrine's sublime miniature has the grandeur of a cathedral—he was also able to take aim with the bow and utilize it to direct his arrow to make

direct contact with his target. He was the captain of the archers... in Bruges.

Artisans in Bruges—and all along the coast there would emerge a series of free cities—were oppressed in that period. They were oppressed by a brutal feudal lord: Charles the Bold.³⁸

After some time, the artisans decided to arm themselves as they were able, and, given that the oppressor placed limits on them that constrained their ability to survive, to make an honest living from their own labor in peace, they decided to put a stop to the oppression in order to establish peace. And they chose as their leader the best painter, and because he was the best painter, because he was also infamous. As a result of all this, Hans Memling headed the Flemish Workers' Army of Artisans, which in the Battle of Golden Spurs, defeated Charles the Bold, the brutal feudal lord, oppressor of kings, vassals, and artisans alike.³⁹ The defeat of Charles was such that, upon his retreat in defeat, his only companions were his two hunting dogs.

And that made Hans Memling the most refined, the most subtle, and the most delicate of painters in probably the whole of European art history.

With these examples all of you can see what the social role of the artist is.

Artists are not simply artists but instead are, first and foremost, human beings: human beings who are profoundly human until the very end. If artists are not capable of feeling all that it is possible for humanity to feel; if artists are not capable of loving others above themselves and are not willing, if necessary, to sacrifice themselves and their own innovative capacities [*genio*]; if they are not capable of risking everything—their innovative capacities, their mind, their life dedicated to producing masterworks—of risking everything that a worker had to risk in 1848 (risking exposing themselves to an anonymous bullet and having their work felled by it, just as Honoré Daumier did, just as Gustave Courbet did); if they do not know how to put down their masterfully powerful paintbrush [*el pincel mágico*] in order to hold tightly in their fists the staff of office [*el bastón de mando*] as they lead the charge against those who oppress the people, as Hans Memling did, as Phidias had done long ago in Greece, or as Michelangelo did in order to defend Florence:⁴⁰ in all of those cases, they would not be great artists.

Great artists are those who are also great lovers of humanity, those who live and work exclusively to contribute all that they are able, the most that they can, and if they cannot give much, they can create harmony among human beings and with all others across the Earth.

And all of you will ask me: and what of the others, the others who are not like great artists and who have stocked their Venetian palaces with a grand collection of paintings of beautiful women that can be flaunted when arriving ambassadors, satisfied with the paintings of women, of fine food, of wine, offer commissions to paint for kings and the nobility. Well, Christians say that divine mercy has no end. They say that no one can know God's plan. We can only

analyze its aims or purposes [*los fines*]: we analyze the plan.

Now then, when artists possessing innovative capacities [*genio*] are surrounded by corruption, when those artists fawn on the masters of industry seeking to coax them into paying for the production of art, but the artists do not set aside their innovative capacities, do not cease possessing their capacity for feeling [*sensibilidad*], or in other words, they do not lack their fundamentally human qualities, then all those surrounding factors, all those awful circumstances surrounding the economic underpinnings of the work of art, disappear.

What would it matter to us that Titian resorted to providing a brothel for his clients? Why would it matter to us that he had on contract an excellent but corrupt poet by the name of Pietro Aretino so that he could write barbed critiques attacking Titian's competitors and favoring him?⁴¹ These issues do not matter when confronted with the beauty of a work by Titian, or when confronting the work of Titian in which there are no falsehoods and there is no corruption. We forget all of that.

But, is there, perhaps, any single work of Titian that could possibly compare in intensity, in artistic power, in quality to those of his contemporary counterpart Tintoretto in the building that we today call the Confraternity of Fisherm... **[audio cut]** Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Saint Roch who was the patron saint of fishermen?⁴² Is there anything in Titian to compare to those marvelous paintings by Tintoretto that display the oppression of the people, that display the suffering of fishermen in the jails of the most serene Republic, that display the people's desire to have a better quality of life and that display, in their most forceful expression, the tragedy of the people and also their redemption? Is there a single work of Titian's that is comparable to these masterworks by Tintoretto? No, there is nothing comparable.

The innovative capacities [*el genio*] of the esteemed Titian were spent. His were a set of minor works. He did not even attempt a work of the magnitude of Tintoretto's, probably because he knew that in the midst of the life he was living, it would have been useless to make such an attempt because he would not have been able to achieve the expression, as did Tintoretto, of the feeling of the people, their modes of being within their lifeways and their experience in the midst of something paralleling what Memling had lived. Memling was a... **[audio cut]**

Michelangelo was a defender of his city who was defeated but heroically so. The work of Phidias proclaimed the triumph of the people in the Battle of Salamis.⁴³ Tintoretto provided a body of visual work so that fishermen, so that sailors, so that all workers in both his time and after would always be able to see with directional clarity: the need to fight against one's oppressors and to fight for one's rights.

Titian did no such thing.

And this enables us to see perfectly the difference between one man and the other. The work of Titian is salvaged by the extraordinary expression of innovative capacities [*genio*] embedded within it. After the passage of hundreds of years, we now forget his role in the ruling order.⁴⁴ But his work does not fulfill the role of providing vital nourishment of the struggle for human equality [*el progreso humano*] embedded in the work of his counterpart Tintoretto. That is the destiny of artists who are with the people and those who are against the people or not with the people. Those who are not with the people are against the people.

For that reason, the social role of the artist can be none other than that of someone like Walt Whitman, who has filled this century and will still continue to fill two or three future centuries more, with his role as the most important interpreter of the social sector committed to equality [*sector progresista*][—]which forms 80% of the people of America—and the social sector committed to a better society, a better industry, a superior agriculture, and a superior love for other human beings. This role is linked to the fact that, through industry, through agriculture, through science, through the advanced arts, we have come to find and enjoy a higher standard of living through which we are all able, with more calm and more peace, to love one another and to live the highest quality of life that popular democracies and socialist republics make available and that one day also—rising above all of today’s contingencies and above all of today’s modes of intolerance—will be made available by the United States, which will see all the nations of this continent incorporated into the vanguard for peace and equality.

NOTES

¹ The mural, *La universidad, la familia y el deporte en México* [*The University, the Family, and Sports in Mexico*] (1952-1954) is a bas-relief style mural, created with colored stones and sought to maintain dialogue with pre-Hispanic art and life. Indeed, the project had been planned as a full historical mural that would narrate the whole of Mexico's sports history—from *el juego de la pelota* through to the twentieth century—in a mural wrapping around the University Stadium. As Daniel Vargas Parra has noted, what was appealing to Rivera in this project was the fact that a major construction project like la Ciudad Universitaria (built roughly between 1949 and 1952) had brought together in a collective project “every sort of specialist who united and unified their labor [*esfuerzos*] in order to generate a socially-oriented architectural project specifically designed for education” (in Gutiérrez Alcalá). Rivera specifically mentions the mural on the University Stadium (along with the murals at the Lerma Water Supply and the Detroit Arts Institute) as those that most consistently sustained his interest as an artist at the end of his life. Indeed, the mural of engineers, workers, chemists, and planners at Lerma and the images of workers engaging in collective, unified, productive activity in Detroit sound very much like some of the preparatory drawings Rivera created for the stadium mural. Moreover, Vargas Parra's description of what motivated Rivera to produce the mural and his preparatory drawings for the full project meshes well with a major aspect of Rivera's description of the social function of the artist in the present text (and works of architecture as emblematic of his vision): as a necessary component of a collective social project. For a general summary of the mural, see Roberto Gutiérrez Alcalá, “*La Universidad, la familia y el deporte en México*,” *Gaceta UNAM*, May 23, 2022, <https://www.gaceta.unam.mx/la-universidad-la-familia-y-el-deporte-en-mexico/>. Rivera shares his views on the stadium, its relation to the rest of the Ciudad Universitaria, and his conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright regarding the stadium in one of the three essays Rivera wrote and Rivera Marín published in the 1964 issue of *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*. See Diego Rivera, “La huella de la historia y la geografía en la arquitectura mexicana: Tercera Parte,” *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* 14 (1964): pp. 41-64. For Rivera's comments on the stadium mural with the Detroit mural and Lerma mural, see Diego Rivera with Gladys March, *My Life, My Art: An Autobiography*, 1960 (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), p. 181.

² The 1956 exhibition and the trip to the Soviet Union with Hurtado was the focus of a multi-site exhibition in Mexico City in 2017. See the catalogue: *Diego Rivera y la experiencia en la URSS* (Toluca de Lerdo, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2017). As noted in materials for a separate exhibition, “Memorias de un retrato: Emma Hurtado y Diego Rivera,” which took place at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City from December 10, 2022 – April 16, 2023, Emma Hurtado was a widely accomplished figure in Mexican society. For example, she played an important role in the area of improving working conditions for front line workers, having successfully advocated for increased free time for workers and broader access to art and culture. While attending university to study hospitality management and accounting, Hurtado worked as a regular employee in her family's store selling textiles. As a result of

this experience, she began advocating for organized eight-hour shifts with required breaks, and her advocacy contributed to approval of legislation in this regard. Because Hurtado was bilingual in Spanish and English, she was able to secure a position in the largest tourism company in Mexico in 1933. She was Mexico's first certified tour guide under the country's tourism law, and as a bilingual woman, she began organizing trips for the wives of U.S. business executives visiting the country. This work eventually led her to found a bilingual weekly magazine—*This Week – Esta Semana* (1935-1974)—that published information about sports, theater, cultural events, and cinema while also providing articles on traditional cultural practices, celebrations, archaeology, art, and history provided by invited specialists. It also included maps, schedules for trains and buses, and other useful information. The success of this venture led her to be able to acquire locations for production of the magazine as well as, eventually (in 1949), space for an art gallery, where she sold Diego Rivera's art using the economic model she learned that galleries in New York used with their artists. As his gallerist, she handled the business side of Rivera's art. As Rivera's second wife (and mother of his two daughters), Lupe Marín, explained, Rivera was not good with money and often was neglectful of his responsibilities in this regard: "we were quite poor [when we were married], and at times we did not have enough to eat. Whatever money Diego made, he spent on his [pre-Hispanic] idols or donated to the Communist Party. He never thought of practical ways to spend his money. Such prosaic things as food, clothing, or the rent were his last considerations After our girls were born, he gave me very little money to support them; otherwise, he was a good papa" (Marín in *My Life, My Art*, p. 185). Hurtado's ability to think operationally, that is, to direct resources to a sustainable production process without needing to sacrifice worker well-being is an idea that underscores some of what Rivera says in the present text (and his broader ideas about what the egalitarian possibilities for socialism are). For more on Hurtado, see the Museo de Arte Moderno's resources from their exhibition on Hurtado: "El Museo de Arte Moderno presenta la exposición *Memorias de un retrato. Emma Hurtado y Diego Rivera*," *Boletín* (INBAL) Num. 989, December 10, 2022, <https://inba.gob.mx/prensa/17132/el-museo-de-arte-moderno-presenta-la-exposicion-memorias-de-un-retrato-emma-hurtado-y-diego-rivera>. See also Hurtado's posthumously published memoir: *Mi vida con Diego: Emma Hurtado, viuda de Diego Rivera* (Mexico City: De la Salle Ediciones, 2017).

³ The album was digitized and made available online by the Internet Archive, with sponsorship for digitization provided by the Kahle-Austin Foundation. The recording is available at the following link: https://archive.org/details/lp_diego-rivera-on-record-in-spanish_diego-rivera/disc1/01.01.+Diego+Rivera+On+Record+In+Spanish.mp3.

⁴ Ruth Rivera Marín was the younger of the two daughters from Rivera's second marriage with Guadalupe Marín Preciado. Her older sister, Guadalupe Rivera Marín, studied law and history, worked as a historian, and eventually headed the Diego Rivera Foundation. Ruth Rivera Marín was an engineer and architect, receiving a degree in Architecture and Engineering at the Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura and, later, a master's degree in urban planning. She worked as a professor and also

served in government roles, such as her work with architectural preservation at the INBA. Her journal, *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, was an architecture-specific supplement to the journal *Cuadernos de Bellas Artes*, which was edited by Celestino Gorostiza. The first issue of her journal focused on the work of Mies van der Rohe, and in 1964, she would dedicate an issue to Rivera's work as an architect (i.e., the Museo Anahuacalli). In the translated text here, Rivera makes reference to excellent works of architecture built "in the provinces," which contrast with the lack of aesthetic value in much of Mexico City's recent (unplanned) growth. Rivera's reference may be to Rivera Marín's work as a member of the Jefatura del Comité Administrador del Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas in Hidalgo state, on which she served between 1956 and 1958 (the period that this interview was recorded). She would later serve in urban planning roles at the national level. He may also be referencing some of the works of contemporary architecture that would be discussed some years later in volume 11 of *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* (October 1963), which focused on the development of architecture in Guadalajara and Jalisco more generally. When she died (at age 42) in December 1969, she was serving as chair of the Department of Architecture at the INBA. See Iván San Martín Córdova, "Ruth Rivera Marín: La misionera de las mil ideas," *Ingenieros de profesión, arquitectos de vocación: Veinticinco protagonistas en la arquitectura mexicana del siglo XX*, Coordinated by Iván San Martín Córdova (UNAM: Mexico City, 2020), pp. 522-541.

⁵ *Diego Rivera in America* (1988), the documentary Rick Tejada-Flores made for the PBS series *American Masters*, uses passages from side 2 of this record to open and close the film. Rivera's voice is heard in voice over as images of his paintings pass across the screen. English-language translations expressing the general idea of what Rivera is saying overwrite the images of the paintings. The partial translations from the opening section are as follows: 1. "All art is propaganda;" 2. "religious art, political art;" 3. "the only difference is the kind of propaganda;" 4. "since art is essential for human life;" 5. "it can't belong to the few;" 6. "art is the universal language;" 7. "and it belongs to all mankind." The partial translations from the closing section are as follows: 1. "An artist is above all a human being;" 2. "profoundly human to the core;" 3. "if the artist can't feel;" 4. "everything that humanity feels;" 5. "if the artist isn't capable of loving;" 6. "until he forgets himself;" 7. "and sacrifices himself if necessary;" 8. "if he won't put down his magic brush;" 9. "and lead the fight against the oppressor;" 10. "then he isn't a great artist;" 11. "the great artist loves his fellow man;" 12. "he works to contribute whatever he can;" 13. "to harmony between men and the Earth;" 14. "and among all men." A pull-out quote from the documentary's title cards opens the Museum of Modern Art's institutional page on Rivera: <https://www.moma.org/artists/4942-diego-rivera>. A version of the documentary was available on YouTube (as of summer 2025): <https://youtu.be/j-lawHyzx4F4?si=xk0oXFySAwTSrYnb>.

⁶ "qué cosa entiendo yo por arte y qué cosa entiendo por artista."

⁷ With the discovery of the Lascaux cave paintings in 1940, modernist artists developed an enthusiastic interest in their role as expressive of a lost "origin" of art. In his article on Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2011), Daniel Spaulding

cites the work of Michael Leja, who argues that modernist art took a deep interest in cave painting and produced a “psychic commonality” (284) with it so as to craft a way forward for art in the context of “atomic-age horrors” (284) and the need to reconstruct societies following World War II. Spaulding cites as a key example of this tendency George Bataille’s *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux, or the Birth of Art* [*La peinture préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l’art*], which was published in 1955, as well as an anthology of essays collecting Bataille’s writing between the 1930s and the 1950s. This body of work argued that prehistoric painting is the lost origin of art. In the context of Latin American literature, we can think of a novel like Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), which, in its structure focused on a parallel phenomenon in music, is from the same era as both Bataille’s writing and Rivera’s text here. In reading Rivera’s reflections in the present text, it is arguable that he was familiar with at least some of what Bataille had to say about Paleolithic painting, and though his reflections evidence some shared points of reference, he develops out a view of art that strongly contrasts with what Bataille articulates. To fully delineate these contrasting views and their implications would require an article of its own. See Daniel Spaulding, “The Prehistoricity of Cinema: Werner Herzog’s *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*,” *Film-Philosophy* 27.2 (2023): pp. 282–300. DOI: 10.3366/film.2023.0230; Georges Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux, or the Birth of Art*, Translated by Austryn Wainhouse (London: Macmillan, 1980); and Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, Edited and introduced by Stuart Kendall, Translated by Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

⁸ Rivera is referring to the following artists: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), José Guadalupe Posada (1851-1913), and José María Velasco (1840-1912).

⁹ The “it” in this sentence has an unclear antecedent. Rivera says the following: “El ser humano de aquellos periodos tenía que ser hábil para vivir con en igual grado o de lo contrario perecían. No era viable.” Rivera’s reference to an “it” here may be referring to class divisions. He may mean something like: a society (like ours) that is stratified along class lines would not have been a viable strategy for survival in the societies formed by early humans.

¹⁰ Rivera says: “¿qué cosa es el arte?” This is the same question he posed to himself in the opening paragraph. Above, I translated it as “what it is I understand when I say ‘art.’” Here, I express the phrase “qué cosa es” as the adverb “conceptually.”

¹¹ Rivera is likely referring here to the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes who used this phrase in his essay/lecture “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana,” which was first presented in Buenos Aires in September 1936 and subsequently revised. See Alfonso Reyes, “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana,” *Obras completas*, vol. XI (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica), pp. 82-90.

¹² This phrase is associated with Plato, but it is also associated with Saint Augustine.

¹³ Rivera may be referencing William Morris’s *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882), which

touches on many of the issues Rivera takes under discussion in the present text. There does not appear to be a passage from Morris's text that matches exactly Rivera's (translated) citation here, so the reference could be to a different work or writer. However, it is possible that Rivera had access to Philip C. Johnson's 1947 catalogue on the work of Mies van der Rohe, which included Mies's short 1940 essay on Frank Lloyd Wright (an architect Rivera mentions in the present text). That essay begins with a reference to the role William Morris had in "[instigating] the great European artistic restoration" (Johnson, Mies, p. 195) at the beginning of the twentieth century. See William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Digital edition for Project Gutenberg by David Price with additional XHTML preparation by Graham Seaman, from *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/index.htm>. For the catalogue where Mies references Morris in the context of Frank Lloyd Wright and the need to renew once vital forms of architecture as art, see Philip C. Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947), p. 195, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2734>.

¹⁴ Here, the adjective "funcional" could also be a reference to the role that Functionalist architecture played in Mexico following the Revolution. Rivera uses the adjective "funcional" three times in this section of the text. For the first two, which are not used to modify "architecture" specifically, I translate "funcional" as "useful" and place the term in Spanish in brackets to direct the reader's attention to this possible additional resonance. The third use of "funcional" specifically modifies architecture, and I translate it as "functionalist or useful." I use the lower-case "f" to dissociate it from the movement structuring earlier architectural practice since I am not certain Rivera is specifically limiting the term to that architectural practice.

¹⁵ A "huacal" is a braided crate made from a variety of materials and looks very much like the framing for a building. Rivera produced a 1944 painting of three men building a *huacal*, which is basically an all-purpose carrying container.

¹⁶ See note 14.

¹⁷ The "it" in this sentence has an unclear antecedent. Rivera says: "Solamente así podrá sobrepasar a aquel que hizo la humanidad cuando aún no estaba y vivía en clases." While the "it" could refer to "humanity," it more likely refers to the future "classless society" mentioned in the previous sentence. In that case, the translation would read: "It is only in that way that this new society will be able to surpass the one created by humanity when that classless society was still in nonexistence and human beings lived within classes."

¹⁸ Rivera's statement lacks some clarity here. Exceptions to what? It's likely the case (based on what he says further on) that a way to clarify his reference to the idea of "exceptions" would be to say the following: "Here there are not exceptions [to art's reduction to its societal function as a mechanism to reproduce power]." This is implied

by what he says in the next sentence as well as his analysis in a number of examples on Side 2.

¹⁹ Giotto is a reference to the influential Italian artist Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1266-1337). Brueghel is a reference to the Netherlandish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569).

²⁰ This paragraph appears to be in dialogue with the statements Mies van der Rohe makes about the relation between architecture and society, or, the fact that “architecture is bound up with its own time, that it can only be manifested in living tasks and in the medium of its epoch. In no age has it been otherwise.” See van der Rohe, “Architecture and the Times,” in Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe*, p. 186.

²¹ Velázquez is a reference to the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). He is likely most famous for *Las Meninas* (1656), hence Rivera’s reference to princesses. But Rivera also mentions other court paintings by Velázquez, which could include *Philip III on Horseback* (ca. 1635) or *The Buffoon Barbarroja, Cristóbal de Castañeda y Pernia* (ca. 1633).

²² Rubens is a reference to the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Rubens is known for painting images of royalty, such as a sequence on the life of the Queen of France, Marie de Medici (paintings now located in the Louvre) or *The Apotheosis of James I* (1630-1634), a work commissioned by Charles I for the ceiling of the Great Hall at Whitehall Banqueting House in Great Britain.

²³ Rivera is referring here to his mural *Man at the Crossroads* (1933), which he had begun installing in Rockefeller Center in New York City. When he included an image of Lenin in the design, he was forced to stop work, and the mural was destroyed.

²⁴ For more information on Rivera’s participation in the October group and his disagreements with the Soviet art establishment, see Tony Wood, “Un hombre en la encrucijada: Diego Rivera en la URSS, 1927-1928,” *Diego Rivera y la experiencia en la URSS* (Toluca de Lerdo, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2017), pp. 43-57. As Wood notes, Rivera mentions some of the challenging experiences in the USSR (he describes them as “political” rather than “aesthetic” differences) in his 1932 essay: “The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art,” *The Modern Quarterly* 6.3 (1932): pp. 51-57, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/786551#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xy-wh=-1673%2C0%2C5895%2C3299>. See also *My Art, My Life*, pp. 82-94. For more on the October group itself, which included, among others, Sergei Eisenstein and Aleksandr Rodchenko, see “October—Association of Artistic Labor Declaration, 1928,” *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*, Edited and Translated by John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking Press, 1976): pp. 273-79. <https://archive.org/details/russianartofavan0000unse/page/272/mode/1up?view=theater>. For a brief history of the October Group, see Brandon Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks, Volume Two: Authority and Revolution 1924-1932* (London and Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1992): pp. 111-143. Some of Rivera’s comments

appear to be paraphrases of some of the points included in the October manifesto included in the Bowlt volume.

²⁵ This is a painting Brueghel completed circa 1560.

²⁶ Rivera could be referring here to the fresco series *Stories of Saint Francis*, which Giotto had painted in the Bardi Chapel in the right transept of Santa Croce Basilica in Florence between 1317 and 1325. Alternatively, he may mean the frescoes Giotto completed in the upper church of Assisi between ca. 1296 and ca. 1304.

²⁷ Rivera is referring to Canto XIX of Dante's *Inferno*, the most famous volume in his Divine Comedy (completed between 1308 and 1321). In that canto, Dante encounters those being punished for the sin of simony, or, the buying and selling of offices and titles within the bureaucracy of the Catholic Church. At one point, Pope Nicholas III (ca. 1225-1280) mistakes Dante for Pope Boniface VIII, who at the time of the events taking place in the story (April 1300), was still alive and thus operated as a kind of "pre-damning to hell" (Boniface would die in 1303). See Dante Alighieri, *The Vision of Hell*, Translated by Rev. Henry Francis Cary (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell and Company Limited, 1892), <https://archive.org/details/visionofhell00dant/page/n7/mode/1up?view=theater>. See also Columbia University's *The Digital Dante*, which includes original commentary, multiple translations, and additional support material: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-19/>.

²⁸ It is likely that Rivera is referring to historical analysis that Marx and Engels provide in the first subtitled section of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), "I. Bourgeois and Proletarians." There, they explain how the bourgeoisie, historically, were oppressed by the power of the feudal lords. In arriving at their assertion that "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part," they go on to provide a whole series of historical examples in which the bourgeoisie, as a historically revolutionary force, tore asunder many of the inequalities of the feudal order. Internal to the logic of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions, however, was a logic of inequality, which, in Marx and Engels' view, produced the antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Rivera is reflecting on the implications that this materialist history has for the social role of the artist. Whereas the bourgeois artist was capable of generating egalitarian pathways in an earlier era, the challenge is to consider what it is possible for the artist to do socially under the present material organization of society.

²⁹ Beethoven refers to the German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). Schiller refers to the poet and philosopher from the German Idealist period Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). André Chénier (1762-1794) was an influential French poet associated with the French Revolution. David refers to the French painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). Daumier (1808-1879) was a French artist who worked in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, lithography and other printmaking methods. Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was a key French painter.

³⁰ Rivera's comments here on Daumier and Courbet repeat some of the views he expressed two decades earlier in "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," p. 51.

³¹ Cézanne is a reference to the seminal French artist Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). Rivera discusses in *My Art, My Life* the early influence of Cézanne on his art: "I came to Europe a disciple of Cézanne, whom I had long considered the greatest of the modern masters" (33). He also brings up Cézanne in this paragraph in a way that parallels his statements in "The Revolutionary Spirit of Modern Art," p. 56.

³² Seurat is a reference to Georges Seurat (1859-1891), the French painter renowned for his utilization of a "scientific" approach to painting: pointillism, which utilized dots of color to produce the figures in the composition as in *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884). Pissarro is a reference to the Caribbean painter Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), who, as a member of a Sephardic Jewish family and also a lifelong anarchist-socialist (committed to the writings and ideas of Pierre Joseph Proudhon [1809-1865] and Peter Kropotkin [1842-1921]), was targeted by both antisemitic and antirevolutionary elements in French society.

³³ Mr. McCarthy is a reference to the Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) who infamously claimed that there were communists or communist sympathizers embedded throughout the U.S. government and that they were traitors or potential traitors to their country.

³⁴ There is some ambiguity in this part of Rivera's text as to whether "la República" is a reference to Mexico or to the United States. Rivera appears to be referencing the four-year term periods for U.S. presidents and the twenty-second amendment to the U.S. Constitution adding presidential term limits, which went into effect in 1951.

³⁵ It is likely Rivera is referring to Picasso's 1954 book focused on his 1952 murals *Peace* and *War*. See Pablo Picasso with Claude Roy, *La Guerre et La Paix* (Paris: Cercle d'art, 1954), ISBN: 978-2702205235.

³⁶ Rivera is referencing Picasso's 1952 murals *Peace* and *War*. See Kirsten Hoving Keen, "Picasso's Communist Interlude: The Murals of *War* and *Peace*," *The Burlington Magazine* 122.928 (1980): pp. 464-470.

³⁷ Rivera is referencing here the German-Flemish painter Hans Memling (1430-1494) and the panels he painted on the reliquary, the *Saint Ursula Shrine* (1489).

³⁸ "Charles the Bold" is a reference to a member of the Burgundian nobility, Charles Martin (1433-1477), who ascended to the role of Duke of Burgundy following the death of his father, Philip the Good, in 1467.

³⁹ It appears that Rivera includes an error in his account. The Battle of Golden Spurs took place in 1302 between French forces (led by the French king Philip the Fair [Philip IV]) and forces controlled by Flemish nobility who did not wish to be annexed

by France during the Franco-Flemish War (1297-1305). While the Flemish did win the Battle of Golden Spurs, they did not win the war. The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) would break out some three decades later, and the events of that set of conflicts produced those Rivera describes. The clearest explanation of the political, economic, and social context for Memling's life and work is provided by Mitzi Kirkland-Ives. See Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, *Hans Memling and the Merchants* (London: Reaktion Books, 2025).

⁴⁰ Michelangelo (1475-1564) refers to the well-known Italian artist who created some of the best-known artworks in the world, including the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (created between 1508 and 1512), *The Last Judgement* (1536-1541), and the sculpture *David* (1501-1504). Phidias (fifth century B.C.E.) was one of the most renowned sculptors of ancient Athens and had an influential legacy. He is linked with monumental sculptures of Athena and Zeus as well as with the construction of the Parthenon.

⁴¹ Titian refers to the Venetian artist Tiziano Vecellio (1485-1576).

⁴² Tintoretto is a reference to the Italian painter Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594) who trained under Titian. Regarding Rivera's statements about Tintoretto's work at the Scuola, as far as I am able to find, Saint Roch (and, in particular, the devotion to Saint Roch that developed out of his interment at the Scuola where Tintoretto painted the works Rivera is discussing) was not the patron saint of fishermen but instead the patron saint of the sick, the incurably ill, the disabled, and, most particularly, victims of plagues and pandemics. Information about the devotion to Saint Roch is available at the Scuola's website as are images of the works by Tintoretto that Rivera discusses in this text. It may be that he is particularly referencing Tintoretto's *Saint Roch Visited in Prison by an Angel* (1567). See the Scuola's website for more images and information: <http://www.scuolagrandesanrocco.org/home-en/>.

⁴³ This appears to be a reference to the fact that Phidias, in what Rivera implies here, is primarily associated with his role in the construction of the Parthenon as a symbol of the Athenian victory over the Persians in the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.E.).

⁴⁴ The last word Rivera says in the sentence is difficult to hear, but it sounds like he says "arconte:" "Olvidamos ahora, después de algunos cientos de años, su papel de arconte [?]." The translation reflects this.