

4 Primitivising the mural either side of the Atlantic

Discourse and contingency in Joaquín Torres-García's murals

Begoña Farré Torras

The 'primitive' Italians and the modern mural

Joaquín Torres-García's trip to Italy in 1911 to study the mural cycles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was not uncommon among artists seeking to give new currency to the traditional practice of mural painting. From the turn of the twentieth century, critical thinking on the mural sought to modernise it by distancing it from academic conventions. The celebrated mural programmes of Trecento and Quattrocento artists, referred to as the primitive Italians, provided an apt source for this purpose. These had been largely executed using the fresco procedure, which had been practiced since antiquity but whose use had declined after the Renaissance to the point where its technical knowledge had become virtually lost. The study trips to Italy were expected to help artists learn how it had been employed in the past to renew its practice in the present.

A key figure in the recuperation of fresco painting and the study of the primitive Italians was the French Paul Baudouin, professor at the École des Beaux Arts, author of the first modern treatise on the subject¹ and founder, with the architect Georges Pradelle, of an association to promote its practice. Convinced that "Giotto and his disciples" had been the protagonists of a "time of magnificent realisations"² Baudouin and Pradelle had planned a research trip to Italy in 1889.³ Though they ultimately had to cancel it due to the former's health problems, by the turn of the century the in situ study of the primitive Italians had become a sort of rite of passage for modern muralists. They were a subject of study for Gerardo Murillo (Dr. Atl) and Roberto Montenegro, pioneering figures of the modern fresco in Mexico, who travelled to Italy around 1906.⁴ Torres-García initiated this research exercise in the Catalan milieu, with a similar journey in 1911, also undertaken in the following years by a number of other local muralists, such as Francesc Galí and Josep Aragay.⁵ From Mexico again, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros would follow around 1920.⁶

Fresco offered, or was bestowed with, a number of qualities that made it conceptually, formally and socially appealing to these modern practitioners. The fact that the procedure harked back to ancient civilisations – Egyptians, Minoans, Greeks – gave it a sense of prestige and ancestry, allowing its representation as the original, "the highest and most noble" form of mural decoration.⁷ Conceptually, fresco marked a radical departure from the *toile marouflée* technique that had been most often used in the grand mural programmes of the nineteenth century, in which oil canvasses painted in artists' studios were then glued onto the wall.⁸ In fresco murals, instead, the artist worked on-site, applying mineral pigments dissolved only in water directly onto the wall's wet lime-based mortar. As the mortar dried, the pigments became chemically bonded and permanently absorbed into the fabric of the building. This was construed as providing a true blending of painting and architecture, which fitted into modernist currents advocating

the integration of the arts.⁹ From a formal perspective, the speed of execution needed in fresco to apply the pigment before the mortar dried, required the artist to work in largely flat colour fields and simplified forms, without much opportunity for the elaborate details and volumetric effects that could be achieved in oil on a canvas. Just as the primitive Italians had done, the reasoning went, modern muralists should use fresco to convey ideas through simple bidimensional forms, rather than attempting to mimic tridimensional reality. By using fresco, moreover, they would be achieving an integration of painting and architecture that had ostensibly been lacking in nineteenth-century *toile marouflée* programmes.

In addition to these qualities derived from the use of fresco, for modern muralists, the appeal of the primitive Italians also encompassed a social dimension. The medieval to early Renaissance chronology of the Italian works allowed twentieth-century practitioners and theorists to portray the mural in general, and the fresco in particular, as a mode of painting belonging to a purportedly more virtuous time, one still untouched by a number of social ills – from the rise of individualism to the birth of capitalism and colonialism – whose onset was associated with the turn of the sixteenth century, coinciding with the ‘high Renaissance’.¹⁰ In opposition to the commodifiable canvas, created by an individual artist for private collecting and viewing, the mural was thus represented as an art form of artisanal, anonymous, collective production and equally collective reception, with a social purpose beyond the exclusive enjoyment of the elites. A distinction between the socially exemplary mural and the individualistic easel painting therefore became a common trope among mural practitioners and theorists.¹¹ Claiming the attributed virtues of the pre-Renaissance mural for its twentieth-century counterpart in effect imbued the latter with social and ideological values that legitimised its ongoing practice in the modern world.

Across the ideological spectrum, this celebration of the pre-Renaissance fresco as a source for a modern mural practice was often grounded on nationalist considerations. In the case of France, it was directly informed by the late nineteenth-century rediscovery and conservation campaigns of Romanesque frescoes in remote rural churches¹² that were now celebrated as national treasures, distinctly French expressions of a glorified medieval past.¹³ A parallel phenomenon occurred in Catalonia. The rediscovery of Romanesque church frescoes in isolated valleys in the Pyrenees, celebrated in this case as distinctly Catalan heritage, sparked an ambitious cataloguing and conservation programme that involved art historians and theorists, but also practitioners. For documentation purposes, the latter, among them figures of Barcelona’s modern mural scene, were asked to travel to these mountain locations to produce coloured renditions of the medieval frescoes for a series of publications that circulated widely in the Catalan artistic milieu.¹⁴ Mexico, too, had a claim to fresco as a national art form. While the procedure was used in most mural programmes of the colonial period, fresco in fact predated it as it had also been practiced by native American civilisations before the Spanish invasion and, with some variations, continued to be used in vernacular architecture at the time of the Mexican revolution in the 1910s. As such, its use was advocated among modern muralists as a genuine expression of both pre-Hispanic and popular contemporary Mexican culture.¹⁵ In Europe as in Latin America, therefore, the modern mural was primitivised by association with the pre-Renaissance, pre-colonial, fresco, and turned into a remedy to the ills of individualism, capitalism and imperialism of the modern world and its art markets, while reinforcing nationalist narratives on either side of the Atlantic.

Torres-García’s mural discourse and early works

Torres-García’s early writings on the mural, as he was becoming established in Barcelona’s noucentista art scene, convey many of the ideas discussed above. In his understanding, painting

should “return to its origins [...] become primitive,”¹⁶ regain a social function, and contribute to a “common aspiration.”¹⁷ To this end, painting should always be “decorative.”¹⁸ *Decorative* is a key term in Torres-García’s theorisation of art, and one tightly entwined with his understanding of the ‘primitive’. He would use the category throughout his life to refer to painting *applied* to a functional object – be it a wall or a vase – with the purpose of conveying *ideas* through strictly *flat*, symbolic representation. Decorative art should *integrate formally* with the object to which it was applied and it should neither attempt to mimic reality, nor act as a mere embellishment, both of which he deplored.¹⁹ In his view, such decorative art – applied, flat and symbolic – was already perfected in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, and could be found in Byzantine mosaics, gothic and early Renaissance painting. The art of all these periods had been part of what he considered a single decorative tradition that had only become interrupted at the end of the fifteenth century with the simultaneous advent of tridimensional, mimetic representation, and the rise of easel painting.²⁰ The decorative tradition had begun resurfacing, always according to Torres-García’s account, with the challenge to mimetic representation brought on by modern art and would now find its fullest expression with the resurgence of the mural.²¹

In line with contemporary thinking on the mural, Torres-García fully advocated the use of fresco, which he considered the only procedure “worthy” of the wall.²² This, in his view, was especially true for the case of Catalonia, on account of this region’s Mediterranean heritage.²³ Following his research trip to Italy in 1911, all the commissions he received in Barcelona, bar one, were executed using this procedure. Whether for public or private buildings, and in accordance with noucentista ideals, these fresco projects were dominated by classical imagery in pastoral scenes evoking an Arcadian world, paired in some cases with depictions of modern industry. Through the use of fresco, Torres-García gave these murals an earthen, muted chromatism, and unpolished finish, which brings to mind the archaeological quality of the ancient frescos and mosaics he was struck by as he visited Rome during his study journey. In combination with the Arcadian subject matter, this use of fresco resulted in a classical-primitivist aesthetic proposal that failed to garner the approval of the more conservative sectors of Noucentisme.²⁴ The controversy caused by his primitivising treatment of Classical imagery in the mural programme he created for the Catalan regional government at the Diputació Palace (1913 to 1917) led to Torres-García’s increasing disillusionment with the Barcelona art scene, which he would ultimately depart in 1920. Before he left the city, Torres-García briefly met David Alfaro Siqueiros, who was temporarily based in Barcelona and collaborated with him in the *Vida Americana* editorial project, where the latter published what would come to be considered his first manifesto on mural painting.²⁵ No further contact is recorded between these two artists. Yet, for reasons that will be addressed further below, two decades after this encounter, Torres-García would write about it, stressing his proximity with Siqueiros at the time.

The mural hiatus that wasn’t: 1920–1937

Torres-García’s departure from Barcelona opened a long hiatus in his mural production. In New York, where he lived between 1920 and 1922, he produced mostly easel paintings as well as continuing a line of wooden toys he had begun a few years earlier. The vibrancy of the city – described enthusiastically in a letter to Salvat-Papasseit and quoted in turn by the latter in *Vida-Americana*²⁶ – gave further stimulus to the pictorial research into fragmented urban views he had initiated in his last years in Barcelona. Yet, while his focus was on portraying the hustle and bustle of New York in increasingly geometrically partitioned compositions, Torres-García also kept on display at his studio several “frescoes”, as well as a maquette of the Diputació project and photographs of what he describes as works from his “classical period”.²⁷ The initial exhilaration produced by the modern metropolis, at any rate, would soon begin to wane.

New York, he wrote, “crushes the artist”; its immensity, relentless movement and deafening noise ultimately became disturbing and challenging.²⁸

By July 1922, two years after arriving in the United States, he was leaving the country to embark on a toy-making venture in Italy. When that failed, he moved again, this time to Villefranche-sur-Mer, in the Côte d’Azur, where he spent another two years before moving to Paris in September 1926.

The works he produced during these sojourns in Italy and Southern France have received relatively little historiographical attention. Studies of his oeuvre tend to skim over this period, treating it as a sort of interlude before his move to Paris, where he would ‘re-join’ the avant-garde and develop the constructive pictorial idiom that would ultimately give him international recognition. Yet, his production of these years, in particular that of Villefranche-sur-Mer, is key to understanding the place that the mural continued to occupy in Torres-García’s artistic concerns, and how closely entwined such a concern remained at the time with a primitivised idea of the Mediterranean.

In an insightful analysis of this period, Pérez-Oramas draws attention to the fact that when New York proved too overwhelming, Torres-García moved not to a European city but “to old rustic Europe”, small tranquil towns in Italy and Southern France – Fiesole, Livorno, Villefranche-sur-Mer – where he was able to reengage with the ‘primitive’.²⁹ It was the arrival at the last of these, on the Côte d’Azur, that by his own account propitiated a desire to resume his mural practice:

Now, with greater conviction than ever, I have gone back to the tradition of the great classical art. I find in me the conditions for monumental art: the use of adequate materials, a profound sense of proportion – an architectural sense, one of structure – an absence of realist sense – I only paint images, not reality – a sense of decoration. I believe that painting should exist only for architecture. The easel painting is always a small thing, isolated, without tradition, individual. I admire above all the anonymous people that made altarpieces and capitals (images) rather than the masters of painting.³⁰

The 1926 excerpt above revisits some of the primitivising tropes already mentioned as having provided legitimacy to the modern mural: exalting it as the only worthy form of painting, in opposition to the easel painting, a signifier of individualism; associating it with the ‘admirable’ anonymous craftsman above the renowned master; claiming for it the purpose of conveying ideas instead of mimicking reality. These were the ‘primitive’ virtues of a renewed mural vocation that Torres-García attributed unequivocally to the fact that, after the frenzy of New York, he was newly “at peace (...) having found the Mediterranean landscape once more”.³¹

A mural vocation, however, required commissions for its fulfilment. In fact, a search for mural commissions may well have been a factor in Torres-García’s decision to move to Villefranche-sur-Mer in the first place; he was encouraged there by his friend the American painter Charles Logasa, who brought to his attention the potential that the many villas being built there at the time offered as a market for murals.³² It was there, indeed, that Torres-García resumed the production of architectural assemblages, resembling frescoed maquettes, that he had initiated in his noucentista years. That these “easel frescoes”, as referred to in his catalogue raisonné, may indeed have served a sort of advertising purpose to obtain commissions, appears to be particularly the case with one of these works, untitled, of which only a photograph has remained³³; rather than reproducing an imaginary classically pedimented construction, as do all the others, this one seems closer to a maquette of what could be an actual vernacular dwelling at this seaside town, potentially showing how his frescoes would work with local architecture.

Mural commissions, alas, were not forthcoming, and Torres-García next public project would have to wait over a decade, after he returned to his native Uruguay. In the meantime, however, the mural remained a concern that manifested itself in other ways in his easel production. When around 1928–1929, already living in Paris, he devised his trademark grid-based constructive compositions, he produced them in oil on canvas using fundamentally two palettes. One of them took the neoplasticist formula of primary colours combined with black and white. The other experimented with washed-down brown, terracotta and ochre hues that bring to mind the earthen chromatism of fresco, and in fact give these compositions a ‘primitive’ archaeological look not unlike that which he had tried to create in his *Diputació murals*.³⁴ In parallel to using this fresco-like palette in primitivist oil-based constructive canvases, he also produced a number of these earthen-toned, easel-sized compositions in actual fresco, on either burlap or canvas, such as *Constructive Fresco with Large Bread* (1929) (Figure 4.1).³⁵ This early production of constructive canvases in both fresco-mimicking oils and in actual fresco suggests that while his enquiries at the time were easel-based, he may also have been exploring the mural potential of the primitivist constructive idiom he would come to theorise as Constructive Universalism.

As he was developing this idiom in 1928, he described it as a solution to years of research, a “synthesis of all [his] work”, strong and constructive, simultaneously “new” and “the most ancient prehistory”.³⁶ He resorted for it to the analogy of a “cathedral” – a “façade” in Pérez Oramas’ interpretation – evoking a built structure upon which he organised an ostensibly universal array of icons. By the early 1930s, following his visits to the Trocadero exhibits, such icons began to include references to the arts of Africa and Oceania, as well as those of pre-Hispanic American civilisations. These now joined a repertoire in which references to the natural (the sun) and the ancient (a classical temple) coexisted with the contemporary (a tram), in an exercise that, in Pérez Oramas’ words, posited modernity as a “compressed time that integrated many different temporalities”.³⁷ It is this condensation of the archaic, the modern and everything in between that characterises Torres-García’s engagement with the ‘primitive’; a form of primitivism that becomes possible from a Western, colonial standpoint, where, as discussed by Antliff and Leighten, an artist “empties its referent of historical contingency and cultural specificity”³⁸ and reduces it to a signifier for an unchanging ‘universal’ truth.³⁹

A construction, a cathedral, a façade... the universal truth pursued by Torres-García was invariably organised within a structure he conceived of as something built. When not resorting

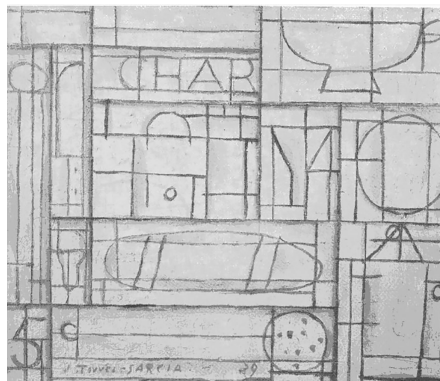


Figure 4.1 Joaquín Torres-García, *Fresque constructif au grand pain*, 1929. Fresco on burlap, 60.5 × 73 cm. London: Private collection. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1929.60. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.

to more generic descriptors such as ‘structure’ or ‘constructive composition’, he used concrete architectural references for the titles of his orthogonal paintings: church, edifice, train station, and cathedral. The architectural and the pictorial were never far apart in his art; the mural sat at their intersection. From his early career he had claimed that painting should be ‘decorative’, that is, flat, symbolic and applied to a functional object, as it had been in ‘primitive’ times.⁴⁰ At Villefranche-sur-Mer he had gone on to write that painting should exist only for architecture. He now viewed with concern the dissociation of these two practices and their mutual exclusion in the modern world. As evidenced in his article “Reflections on Architecture”,⁴¹ written from Paris for the Barcelona-based publication *Mirador*, by the 1930s he had joined the growing chorus of voices denouncing what they saw as the dehumanisation and standardisation that the modern international movement had brought to architecture. For Torres-García, the modern house created by a rationalist architect lacked a spiritual dimension; reintegrating the crafts and the visual arts with architecture was necessary to restore it. He was no doubt hoping this realisation among architects might result in mural commissions for artists like himself.

The Saint Bois project in Montevideo in the context of Latin American muralism

Following his return to his native Uruguay in 1934, Torres-García would still have to wait a few years to receive the commissions he had been hoping for ever since he completed his latest mural in Barcelona in 1919. His first Uruguayan project arrived in 1937, when he was asked to create a public work for the Rodó Park in Montevideo. For this, Torres-García produced *Cosmic Monument*, a wall made up of orthogonal stone blocks of various sizes, each displaying a motif from his usual repertoire. The motifs here were not painted on the wall but directly incised on it. The overall effect strongly evokes the look of a construction from a long-gone civilisation. *Cosmic Monument* is not a mural painting but rather functions as a built version of Torres-García’s constructive universalism canvasses, and as such provides a further example of the blurred line between a painting and a wall in his oeuvre.⁴²

A few years later, in 1944, Torres-García received a second commission, a mural programme for the state-run Saint Bois tuberculosis hospital, also in Montevideo. The commission came from the establishment’s director, doctor Pablo Purriel, motivated by his belief in the therapeutic potential of art.⁴³ Writing shortly after the project’s completion, Torres-García described what both commissions, *Cosmic Monument* and Saint Bois, had meant to him:

What I always strove for was decorative monumental art, with a general human sense, religiously secular, collective and bordering on the artisanal; art of people and not of class. And I congratulate myself that it has been here, in my homeland, that I have been able to fully realize such a profound aspiration.⁴⁴

This short statement once more touches on a number of points that had long been part of Torres-García’s conceptualisation of the mural, and then adds a twist. Torres-García speaks here of a profound aspiration to create “decorative monumental art”, which is indeed corroborated by his prolific early-career mural practice in Barcelona, as well as by the various expressions of this mural vocation, in the absence of actual commissions, posited in the previous section. He also makes a reference to the collective and the artisanal, attesting to the sustained currency, in his thinking, of the primitivising virtues that had helped legitimise the mural as a modern art form in the early decades of the century. Yet, he now introduces a pointed distinction between “people” and “class”, as recipients/owners/agents of this art.⁴⁵ This constitutes a subtle yet relevant novelty in Torres-García’s discourse on the mural, evident only after he returned to Uruguay, which calls for closer examination.

Constructive Universalism and Mexican muralism

Torres-García had moved back to Uruguay, aged 60, after a 43 year absence, as an established, albeit broke, artist having made his name in Europe. Acclaimed by some as an introducer of the avant-garde in the otherwise markedly academic Uruguayan art milieu, he nevertheless struggled to gain acceptance for the primitivist constructive aesthetics he had developed in Paris in the late 1920s. His attempts to shake up artistic conventions – through initiatives such as the opening of the exhibition venue Estudio 1037 (1934), the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (1935), and its *Círculo y Cuadrado* magazine⁴⁶ (first published in 1936), or the Taller Torres-García (1943) – had met with strong resistance from opposing sectors. The orthogonal compositions of schematic signs that characterised his artistic proposal were dismissed by the conservative establishment as an attempt against basic principles of representation and beauty. For leftist sectors, on the other hand, they were a European import and an example of art at the service of capitalism, disconnected from class struggles.⁴⁷ His work was explicitly described as being “in the antipodes” of the socially-engaged murals of David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974),⁴⁸ whose visit to Uruguay in 1933, a year before Torres-García’s return, had left a strong impression on the country’s more restless sectors.⁴⁹

This comparison of Torres-García’s work with that of Siqueiros is illustrative of the artistic and political context in which the former sought to legitimise his primitivist constructive proposal in the broader Latin American cultural sphere. With its commitment to abstraction and the metaphysical, Constructive Universalism effectively constituted a counter-paradigm to the kind of social critique through narrative figuration that, spearheaded by Mexican muralism, largely defined the Latin American avant-gardes.⁵⁰

That Torres-García kept informed about Mexican muralism, and was willing to enter into a public dialogue with the movement, becomes apparent in three articles, dated 1938, 1940 and 1942, that he had published prior to receiving the Saint Bois commission. The first article reproduces a talk he gave as part of a tribute to Mexico that took place at Montevideo’s Ateneo.⁵¹ As befitted the purpose of the event, his speech was celebratory of that country’s art. It began by applauding the early avant-garde movement *Estridentismo* for its ability to bring together the European and the “indigenous” in an “emancipatory movement of great vitality”.⁵² It then moved on to the country’s muralist movement, “the definitive Mexican art” as embodied in the figures of Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco.⁵³ While stressing that his own artistic proposal was entirely different from theirs, Torres-García felt compelled, he says, to “speak with enthusiasm” of their art “of the people and for the people” for the strength with which it engaged with social issues, as well as the way these three managed ostensibly to “cut ties with European art in order to model an American art”.⁵⁴

Continuing in this vein, in 1940 Torres-García penned a second article, this time devoted specifically to Siqueiros.⁵⁵ The text revisited many of the topics of the 1938 talk, and even reused an entire paragraph from it, praising Siqueiros, along with Rivera and Orozco once again, for the way their art sought “the redemption of the proletariat through revolution”, eschewing aesthetic speculation and denouncing the “human pain that labours in the depths of our pseudo-civilization.”⁵⁶ The specific focus on Siqueiros, this time round, allowed Torres-García to draw attention to their early interaction in Barcelona – as discussed earlier in this essay – when around 1919–1920 they collaborated in the *Vida Americana* magazine edited by the Mexican artist. The tone and contents of this 1940 article suggest an attempt by Torres-García to establish a certain common ground with Siqueiros despite their artistic differences, which he plainly acknowledged. In Barcelona, he describes, they were both part of a combative group of artists, gathering around the “revolutionary” poet Joan Salvat-Papasseit to “promote the most advanced ideas.”⁵⁷ After their respective departures from the city, he claims, he followed Siqueiros’ progress

through magazines; their artistic divergence over the years, he stresses, was perhaps less so than one might think. After all, he argued, they were both “on the side of truth”, and their differing temporal focuses – Siqueiros’ on the present, his own on eternity – could “on a certain plane (...) become one”.⁵⁸

The celebratory tone of these two articles (1938 and 1940) with regard to Mexican muralism and its main figures disappears altogether in a third instance where they are mentioned in Torres-García’s discourse, a 1942 conference entitled “Art and Communism”.⁵⁹ This was a rare case of Torres-García overtly addressing politics, as by his own admission he “detest[ed] politics and the political struggle”.⁶⁰ In this case, however, he felt that a reality of social and political unrest compelled everyone to “define oneself”.⁶¹ At this, he argued that he was neither bourgeois – as he was routinely labelled by the left⁶² – nor did he agree with the materialistic basis of modern communism which, in his view, left no room for the metaphysical. He was, instead, an “idealist”, a “free-thinker”, a “mystic”, not belonging to any “dogmatic religion”; he identified rather with a “primitive” form of communism involving communal life and belongings as practiced, in his view, “a few centuries before our era” as well as by “the early Christians”.⁶³

His art, he contended, could therefore not be bourgeois; neither was it proletarian “as the communists want it, and even more, *as it should not be made*.”⁶⁴ Here, pointing his criticism explicitly at Rivera and Siqueiros, he described what he considered “the greatest mistake” of communist artists as believing that art must always be “representation, anecdote, drama, spectacle”. On the contrary, he argued, art should not aim at telling stories but must rather speak for itself. Abstraction, in his view, was in no way incompatible with a communist ideology; addressing the issue of what Leighton has called “a politics of form”,⁶⁵ Torres-García found greater merit in the way such an ideology was conveyed in the “abstract, (...), plastic, non-literary art” of Freundlich, Van Doesburg and Mondrian.⁶⁶ In this regard, he concluded, “the greatest work of art realised by the communist, is that sickle and that hammer traced on any wall, with charcoal or any old brush. Because that symbol is perfectly plastic and written with the heart.”⁶⁷

This succession of articles suggests a growing tension, at least from Torres-García’s perspective, between his primitivist constructive art proposal and the social narrative approach of Mexican muralism. In the 1938 and 1940 articles Torres-García appears to have sought a sort of rapprochement with the latter, or at least show that their respective positions were not “in the antipodes”⁶⁸ of each other, possibly hoping there was room for the amiable co-existence of radically different aesthetics in the Latin American artistic sphere. However, his appeal in those articles to purportedly shared values with Mexican muralism – art of and for the people, social awareness, aesthetic revolution, (purported) emancipation from European canons – gave way, by 1942, to an unusually explicit political piece in which Torres-García seems to feel the need to refute accusations of bourgeois bandied at himself and his art, while pointedly critiquing Mexican muralism for its, in his view, unnecessary use of ‘literary’ figuration to effect social change.

Against this background, the 1944 Saint Bois commission represented for Torres-García, now aged 70, an opportunity to take his primitivist constructive aesthetics to a wider audience, developing it for the first time in a format, the mural, that had for decades now been central both to his own practice and to artistic and social discourse in Latin America.

Saint Bois: project brief, production and reception

Saint Bois would arguably be the most ‘social’ of Torres-García’s mural projects. However numerous, his Barcelona murals would have had relatively limited social reach, designed as they were for highly representational spaces at the seat of municipal or regional power, for two small churches, or for private residences, including his own. At Saint Bois, he was being asked to

contribute to a broader initiative to bring literature, music and art into the therapeutic programme of a public hospital for tuberculosis. With the stated purpose of “giving spiritual contents to State healthcare”,⁶⁹ Doctor Purriel installed a library and a music room, as well as commissioning the murals for different parts of the facilities, from wards and waiting rooms to the hospital’s pharmacy, kitchen and the drivers’ room. The artist conceived the Saint Bois project as a collective one that would provide a practical exercise in Constructive Universalism for his students at the Taller Torres-García, which he had established the year before. Working for free,⁷⁰ the group was to create a total of 35 panels, of which Torres-García reserved seven for himself, including *The Sun* (Figure 4.2)⁷¹ and assigned the remaining ones among 20 students.⁷² For purposes of programme coherence, the students were given the brief to create “locally-themed” compositions, based on the golden ratio and using only primary colours in black-contoured fields.⁷³

The resulting work received mixed reviews. The commissioner, doctor Purriel, was delighted with it, as were the patients at Saint Bois, who spoke of the “joy and colour” that the murals had brought to hospital life.⁷⁴ Disregarding this favourable reception by the project’s main intended audience, the art critical establishment issued scathing reviews; the murals were deemed completely inadequate for the setting of a hospital, their chromatism aggressive, potentially harmful for the patients, their abstractionism the failed result of an excessively cerebral approach to art.⁷⁵

Even former students of the Taller subsequently expressed reservations as to the project’s success with regard to a basic tenet of Torres-García’s theorisation, the integration of art and architecture.⁷⁶ The call for such integration, as discussed before, was grounded on his primitivist understanding that painting should be an applied art with a social purpose, as it had been, in his view, before the rise of the easel painting; when applied to architecture, painting should become one with it, be the “decorative monumental art” to which, as per the quote above, he had always aspired.⁷⁷ Yet, as observed by Guillermo Fernández and Rafael Lorente, several of the panels at Saint Bois appeared to be little more than enlarged versions of constructive universalist canvases painted in the middle of a wall, with no discernible dialogue between them and the surrounding architecture.⁷⁸

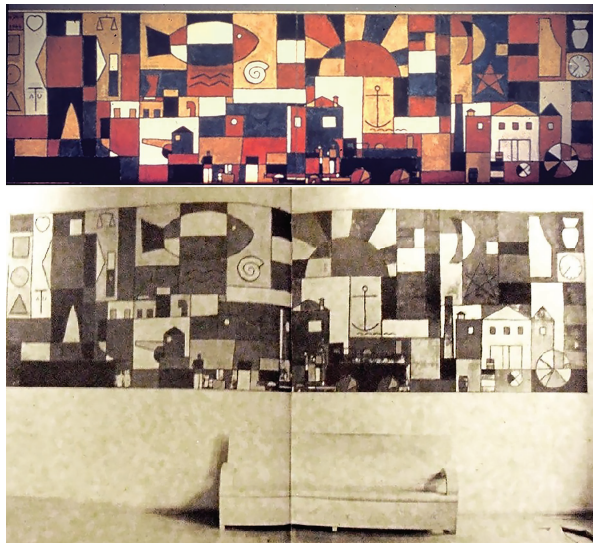


Figure 4.2 Joaquín Torres-García, *El Sol*, 1944. Enamel paint on wall, 195.5 × 662 cm. Mural for the Saint Bois Hospital in Montevideo, transferred to canvas 1972, destroyed 1978. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1944.26. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García. The mural on site, photograph as published in Soiza 2018.

Any appreciation of this issue is today undermined by the scarce surviving evidence of what the precise original context was for each mural.⁷⁹ Torres-García's seven panels were subsequently destroyed and few photographs remain showing them in their original site. The images that exist, however, suggest a degree of spatial and functional integration with the hospital's architecture for at least some of his murals. Such is the case of *The Sun* (Figure 4.2, above), a horizontal composition, raised from floor level, and extending almost the entire width of the available wall space. At around 2 meters in height by over 6.6 meters in width, the panel thus effectively replaced the upper section of the original white wall with a 'wall' of coloured rectangular and square blocks, populated with the usual repertoire of schematic signs, much like a painted version of *Cosmic Monument*. The lower section of the wall, meanwhile, was purposely left blank so that furniture and equipment could be placed against it, thus preserving the functionality of the room. While no on-site images are known to remain of another panel, *The Tram*,⁸⁰ its almost identical dimensions to *The Sun*, suggest it was spatially and functionally integrated in a similar way elsewhere in the facilities.

At any rate, though, and considering the project as a whole, a seemingly timid integration of architecture and painting is a valid critique for an artist who throughout his career had made such a point of distinguishing the (virtuous, collective, primitive) mural from the (individualistic, decadent, post-Renaissance) easel. As recently as 1940 he had once more written on the error of believing that mural painting involved merely transferring "a small painting to the wall, as if by simply enlarging it, it can fulfil the required decorative purposes".⁸¹ The question arises then as to why so many of the panels at Saint Bois, including some by Torres-García himself, seem to be just that, enlarged versions of his canvasses. To a certain extent, an answer might lie in his fundamental understanding of a painting as something 'built'. By the 1940s, his conceptual association between the actions of painting and building was being expressed in literal terms. One must paint, he would describe:

just as a mason builds a wall – and he lays – a brick – then mortar – then another brick – and more mortar – and always with a level and plumb. The same for the painter: pure red – an angle – then blue – a form – white – black – yellow – and always with the sector at hand and the carpenter's square in order to place everything in an orthogonal rhythm.⁸²

Based on this, one might argue that each Constructive Universalist work, whatever its dimensions and materiality, effectively functioned as a 'painted wall' in and of itself; stretching this conceptual argument, it could be posited that, when executed directly on an actual wall, a Constructive Universalist painting integrated with its built support regardless of its size and location. It is worth stressing, at any rate, that existing images do not necessarily show the functional elements – furniture, hospital equipment – that may have conditioned the dimensions and placement of each panel. In this regard, the possibility must be considered that beyond the theoretical aspiration to achieve a formal or conceptual integration of painting with architecture, what may have taken precedence at Saint-Bois were the practical considerations of integrating painting with a working hospital environment.

"Bordering on the artisanal"... to fresco or not to fresco

A further aspect that can be construed as undermining any attempted integration of painting and architecture at Saint Bois was the fact that, contrary to Torres-García's career-long championing of fresco as the 'primitive' means for such integration,⁸³ all the panels at Saint Bois were executed in industrial oil-based enamel paint directly applied onto the existing plaster.⁸⁴ By the

1930s, the question of materials and procedures – and in particular, the key problem of whether to fresco or not to fresco – had become a major point of debate, often ideologically charged, among muralists in Latin America. As already mentioned, in Mexico fresco had been promoted since the early twentieth century as a purportedly authentic Mexican procedure on account of its pre-Hispanic practice by native American cultures. Its continued use over the centuries by indigenous communities, seen as heirs to that pre-colonial legacy, gave this medium further revolutionary legitimacy.⁸⁵ Over time, fresco had become associated with all pre-Hispanic civilisations, and it was enthusiastically adhered to by practitioners throughout Latin America.⁸⁶ Rivera, among them, continued to argue for it on account of its intrinsically architectural nature: “Nothing can take the place of fresco in mural painting, because fresco is not a painted wall, but rather a painting that is a wall”.⁸⁷ Siqueiros’s views on the subject, meanwhile, had taken a radically different direction. His early 1920s murals at Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City were produced using fresco, as well as the equally ancient encaustic procedure.⁸⁸ However, the murals he was commissioned to create in Los Angeles in 1932 were to be executed outdoors on concrete walls, as opposed to indoors on adobe or brick walls as had been the case in Mexico. The difficulty of applying fresco to modern concrete, added to Siqueiros’ own forward-looking stance and technological curiosity, led him to try out new mortar and pigment formulations that he and his Bloc of Painters’ crew no longer applied by hand, but projected onto the wall by mechanical means.

Siqueiros would explain this new approach in ideological terms as a necessary revolution in mural painting. Traditional fresco, he argued, had been the “organic” choice when Mexican muralism had been painting on “old architecture” and “colonial buildings”.⁸⁹ Now, however, a truly modern, proletarian, society required new architectural materials, and a new mural procedure to go with it. Traditional fresco had become an anachronism, as pointless as “using a church organ [to produce] psychologically subversive revolutionary music”.⁹⁰ He now refuted all the primitivising traits with which fresco had been imbued by Mexican muralism: its “slow, labour-intensive, artisanal” nature clashed against “the violence of contemporary life”⁹¹; its identification with pre-Hispanic cultures had been but a “demagogical idealisation of the Indian”⁹²; its celebration as part of popular culture – a culture that he now characterised as pleading and subservient – was contrary to the “dialectical, aggressive, threatening and tremendously optimistic voice” of the proletariat.⁹³ Traditional fresco, he sentenced, was “socially dead”, the future belonged to the experimental methods he had initiated with the Los Angeles Bloc of Painters.⁹⁴

As a long-standing advocate of fresco himself, Torres-García was no doubt aware of the place that fresco occupied in the Latin American artistic imaginary and ideological discourse. His 1938 and 1940 articles discussed earlier show that he was familiar with Rivera’s and Siqueiros’ contrary positions with regard to it.⁹⁵ In these articles, Torres-García celebrated Rivera’s adherence to fresco and his early adoption of it as the most adequate procedure for the “severe, rough and sober style” he had been developing in the 1920s for a “truly Mexican art”.⁹⁶ Taking the opportunity to claim his own role in the modern rediscovery of fresco, Torres-García proceeded to clarify that he himself had already been experimenting with it in Barcelona many years before Rivera did so in Mexico. As had been the case in Mexico, the identity dimension associated with the recovery of fresco was equally applicable to his own efforts in the 1910s, when he had endeavoured to modernise the procedure in “similar circumstances [of] Resurgence of the Catalan people”.⁹⁷ Still, and perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, his own keenness for fresco did not prevent him from also seeing merit in Siqueiros’ attempts at producing murals by collective mechanical means: though he found them flawed, it was not so much in principle, he explained, as in the way Siqueiros had gone about it.⁹⁸

That fresco remained part of Torres-García's practice around the time of the Saint Bois commission, as well as a cornerstone of his conception of the mural is evidenced in a number of works. In the previous years, he had resumed the production of constructive frescoes, initiated over a decade earlier in Paris, with two further pieces, *Universal man with two figures and cross* (1942),⁹⁹ and *Pyramidal constructive* (1943) (Figure 4.3). While the first one was produced on burlap, like the Paris works, the second one was painted on a thick slab of mortar, which at 150 cm high does not easily fit into the 'easel fresco' category but rather gives the impression of an actual mural, if at small scale. Fresco was also the procedure of choice for yet another mural commission he received in Montevideo around the same time as the Saint Bois project. It was equally for a hospital, the Rodríguez López Maternity Hospital, for which he created a figurative scene of a mother and child, with a male figure standing nearby, set in a Mediterranean landscape (Figure 4.4). The mural is no mere revisitation of the themes and pictorial language of his early mural production in Barcelona, but in fact reproduces, at real scale, a section of one of the 1910s Diputació frescoes. It is one of the more striking instances of Torres-García's return to previous forms and themes, a practice that characterises his entire body of work.¹⁰⁰

At the time Torres-García received the Saint Bois commission, fresco was therefore clearly present in his practice, and was as valid for an Arcadian figurative composition as for a Constructive Universalist one. Yet, for the Saint Bois project, he opted instead for industrial

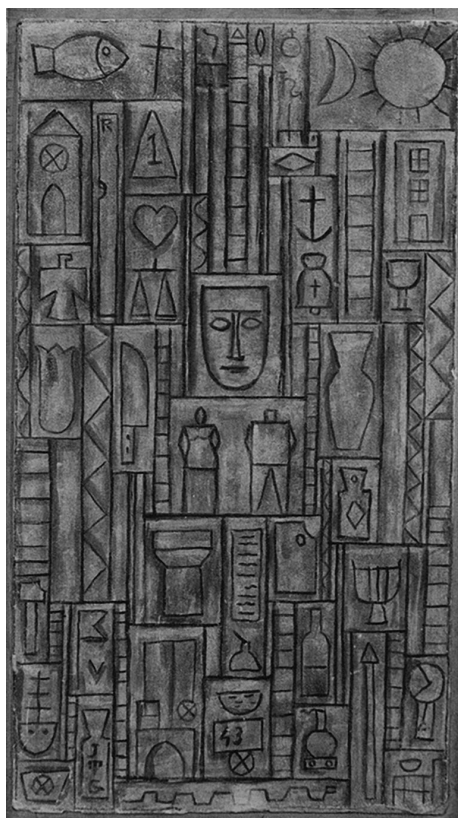


Figure 4.3 Joaquín Torres-García, *Constructivo piramidal*, 1943. Wood-mounted fresco, 152.5 × 85 cm. Barcelona: Private collection. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1943.11. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.

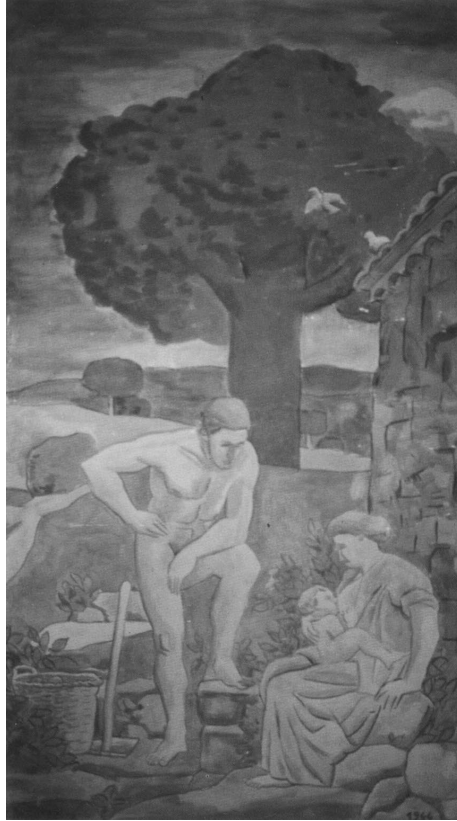


Figure 4.4 Joaquín Torres-García, *Mural de la Maternidad*, 1944. Fresco on wall, 376 × 214 cm. Montevideo: Sanatorio 3, CASMU. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1944.39. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.

enamel paint. This raises an issue with regard to his primitivist discourse surrounding the mural, which as quoted above he continued to conceive of as “bordering on the artisanal”, a notion more readily associated with the slow, labour-intensive procedure of fresco than with the application of industrial paint. Given that the Saint Bois hospital was a modernist construction,¹⁰¹ it might be tempting to see in his choice a heeding of Siqueiros’ call to pair modern architecture with modern painting materials. Then again, this argument is invalidated by Torres-García’s choice of fresco, that same year, for the maternity hospital, which happened to be an equally modernist building.

The brief at Saint Bois was to create a mural programme that would contribute to the well-being of patients and staff. Torres-García wished to develop this programme as an exercise in Constructive Universalism, showcasing for the first time in mural form the social potential of its non-narrative, metaphysical, geometrised and primitivist pictorial language. This, he had been exploring since the late 1920s in various palettes: initially using either the primary colours of Neoplasticism, or the earthen tones of fresco, and subsequently adding a third grisaille-like option combining black and white. Of these, the vibrant hues of the neoplasticist palette were evidently deemed the most apt to counter the depressive states often associated with tuberculosis.¹⁰² That would have advised against the use of fresco, a procedure with which bright, saturated, colours are difficult to achieve, with blue being, moreover, notoriously unstable.¹⁰³

At any rate, the Taller students were untrained in the use of fresco; teaching it to them in a relatively short period of time would not have been a viable option. Finally, fresco is a disruptive procedure, involving costly scaffolding and building materials, and generating no small amount of dust, which made it clearly unsuited to the functioning and air quality requirements of a hospital for a respiratory disease. In the face of these considerations, Torres-García's choice must have been straightforward: industrial paint not only guaranteed the desired chromatism, it also ensured the viability and expediency of the whole project.

The Saint Bois project thus tested fundamental tenets of Torres-García's primitivist theorisation on the mural, grounded on the notions of the collective, socially functional and decorative (that is, applied, flat and symbolic painting). On the one hand, it constituted the most clearly collective project of his career, not only involving the patron, Dr. Purriel, and 20 Taller students but also being part of a wider programme that encompassed other arts with a common therapeutic purpose. Saint Bois was also arguably his project with the broadest social reach, designed for the patients and workers of a state-run hospital. In the politically-charged Latin American art scene, it allowed him to showcase the social intervention potential of his primitivist-constructive, abstract-metaphysical aesthetics. On the other hand, however, the practicalities of the commission forced him to suspend some of his most dearly held principles of mural decoration; the formal and material integration of the painted panels with the surrounding architecture was ultimately conditioned by the project's therapeutic brief, the functional requirements of a working hospital and the inexperience of his students in the use of fresco. While providing a long sought-after outlet for his mural vocation, Saint Bois also brought home to Torres-García the extent to which the practical application of primitivist mural discourse was subject to contingency.

Notes

- 1 Paul Baudouin, *La fresque: sa technique, ses applications*. Paris: Librairie centrale des beaux-arts, 1914.
- 2 Idem, 4.
- 3 Marie Monfort, "Paul Baudouin, Georges Pradelle et l'association « la Fresque »", *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines*, 22, 17 October 2013.
- 4 The exact dates of Dr. Atl's sojourn in Italy are unclear. According to Siqueiros' account it would have taken place around 1904–1906. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*. Cuernavaca: Ediciones Taller Siqueiros, 1951, 22.
- 5 Joaquín Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*. Girona: Masó, 1913, 53.
- 6 María José González Madrid, *Vida-Americana: la aventura barcelonesa de David Alfaro Siqueiros*. Valencia: IVAM/L'Eixam, 2000, 8. González points out that the precise dates of this trip have not been established, nor is it clear whether this was a joint journey or each went separately.
- 7 Paul Baudouin, *La fresque...*, op. cit., 4.
- 8 Marie Monfort, "Paul Baudouin...", op. cit.
- 9 As attested to, for example, by the experimental teaching of fresco at the Weimar Bauhaus wall painting workshop, under Kandinsky, as a way to achieve a unity between painting and architecture. Klaus-Jürgen Winkler (ed.), *Bauhaus Alben 3: The Weaving Workshop, The Wall-Painting Workshop, The Glass-Painting Workshop, The Bookbinding Workshop, The Stone-Carving Workshop*. Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität, 2008, 120–149.
- 10 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit.; Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit.; Fernand Léger, "Mural Painting and Easel Painting", *Functions of Painting* (Edward F. Fry, ed.). New York: Viking Press, 1973, 160–164. Siqueiros actually stretches the chronology of pre-individualistic art to 1600. Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit., 7.
- 11 Joaquín Torres-García, "Esbós autobiogràfic del pintor Torres-García", *D'ací i d'allà*, February 1926, 439; David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Los vehiculos de la pintura dialéctico-subversiva", 1932, Biblioteca Nacional de Montevideo, Archivo Luis Eduardo Pombo [ICAA]; Sigfried Giedion, "The Need

- for a New Monumentality”, *New Architecture and City Planning* (Paul Zucker, ed.). New York: Philosophical Library, 1944, 557; Fernand Léger, “Mural Painting and Easel Painting”, op. cit.
- 12 Monfort, “Paul Baudouin...”, op. cit.
 - 13 Baudouin, *La Fresque...*, op. cit., 1–15.
 - 14 Josep Pijoan and Josep Puig i Cadafalch, *Les pintures murals catalanes* (Xavier Barral i Altet, ed.). Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1907; Josep Pijoan, “De com es varen descobrir i publicar les pintures murals catalanes”, *Gaseta de les Arts*, 1, 1, 15 October 1924, 5–6.
 - 15 Josep Minguell Cardenyas, “Jean Charlot y la introducción de la pintura al fresco en el movimiento muralista mexicano”. Unpublished conference at the Jean Charlot Foundation. Honolulu, 2010, https://vault.jeancharlot.org/writings-on-jc/2010_josep-minguell-cardenyas_movimiento-muralista-mexicano.pdf.
 - 16 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit., 46.
 - 17 Torres-García, “La nostra ordinació i el nostre camí”, *Empori*, April 1907; reproduced in Torres-García, *Escrits sobre art* (Francesc Fontbona, ed.). Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980, 29.
 - 18 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit., 45.
 - 19 Idem, 86–91.
 - 20 Ibidem, 45–46.
 - 21 Ibidem, 51–53.
 - 22 Ibidem, 52–55.
 - 23 Begoña Farré Torras, “The Mediterranean as the Primitive Source for Noucentisme: Joaquín Torres-García’s ‘Classical Primitivism’ – from Arcadian Frescoes to Constructive Universalism”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10, 2, Fall 2021, 61–70.
 - 24 Idem, 65–66. The conflation of the classical and the primitive has also been discussed for Fernand Léger by Robert L. Herbert, “Léger, the Renaissance, and ‘Primitivism’”, *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, 143–151.
 - 25 Siqueiros, “Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana”, *Vida-Americana, Revista norte centro y sud-americana de vanguardia*, May 1921.
 - 26 Joan Salvat-Papasseit, “Dos pintores uruguayos”, *Vida-Americana: Revista norte centro y sud-americana de vanguardia*, 1921.
 - 27 Torres-García, “Esbós autobiogràfic...”, op. cit.
 - 28 Luis Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015, 22. Pérez-Oramas quotes Torres-García here from *Impresiones de Nueva York* an unpublished 1921 account of his stay in this city, reproduced in Juan Fló, *J. Torres-García: New York*. Montevideo: Fundación Torres-García; Casa Editorial HUM, 2007, 75.
 - 29 Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 24.
 - 30 Torres-García, “Esbós autobiogràfic...”, op. cit.
 - 31 Idem, 439.
 - 32 Cecilia de Torres et al., “The Catalogue”, *Joaquín Torres-García: Catalogue Raisonné*, 24 June 2022, no. 1925.19, <http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/>.
 - 33 Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1925.19.
 - 34 Farré Torras, “The Mediterranean...”, op. cit., 66.
 - 35 Catalogue raisonné refs. 1928.225 *Constructivism*; 1929.57 *Composition*; 1929.60 *Constructive Fresco with Large Bread*; 1929.70 *Street*.
 - 36 Letter from Joaquín Torres García to Guillermo de Torre, 8 November 1931, Buenos Aires, Mario Gradowczyk archive, as quoted in Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 29.
 - 37 Idem, 30.
 - 38 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitivism”, *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds.). Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 170.
 - 39 On Torres-García’s problematic use and theorisation of pre-Hispanic referents in Constructive Universalism, see Aarnoud Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García: Constructive Universalism and the Inversion of Abstraction*. New York: Routledge, 2017, particularly 106–118.
 - 40 See note 18.
 - 41 Torres-García, “Reflexions sobre arquitectura”, *Mirador, setmanari de literatura, art i política*, 27 August 1931. Reproduced in Torres-García, *Escrits sobre art*, op. cit., 231–234.
 - 42 An analysis of *Cosmic Monument* in juxtaposition with the aesthetics and politics of Mexican muralism, can be found in Gianmarco Visconti, “Universal Constructivism and Politics: Torres-García in Conversation with Siqueiros”, *Constellations*, 5, 1, 2013, 67–84.

- 43 María Laura Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García y los murales del Hospital Saint Bois: testimonios para su historia*. Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 2008, 17.
- 44 Torres-García, “Significado del Monumento Cómico del Parque Rodó y de los murales de la Colonia Saint Bois”, *Marcha*, 15 September 1944, n.p.
- 45 In Spanish “arte de pueblo y no de clase”. The use of the preposition *de* (of), as opposed to *para* (for) broadens the role of “people” beyond that of mere recipients of his art, to encompass potentially also that of owners and/or agents.
- 46 Conceived as a continuation of the *Cercle et carré* association and magazine founded by Torres-García with Michel Seuphor in Paris in 1929.
- 47 See the series of articles penned by Norberto Berdía shortly after Torres-García’s arrival in Uruguay: Norberto Berdía, “En la sociedad burguesa ganan los banqueros y pierden los artistas: el caso del Pintor Torres García”, *Movimiento*, May 1934; “El arte de Torres García”, *Movimiento*, June 1934; “Contestando a Torres García”, *Movimiento*, October 1934. [ICAA]
- 48 Berdía, “El arte de Torres García”, op. cit.
- 49 Anonymous, “Se encuentra en montevideo un artista excepcional: David Alfaro Siqueiros”, *El Ideal*, 16 February 1933. [ICAA]
- 50 Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 31.
- 51 The talk was subsequently published. Torres-García, “El arte mejicano”, *AIAPE*, October 1938, 6–7. [ICAA]
- 52 *Idem*, 6.
- 53 *Ibidem*, 6.
- 54 *Ibidem*, 6.
- 55 Torres-García, “El Arte de David Alfaro Siqueiros”, *AIAPE*, December 1940, 11. [ICAA]
- 56 *Idem*, 11.
- 57 *Ibidem*, 11.
- 58 *Ibidem*, 11.
- 59 Subsequently published in Joaquín Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, *Universalismo Constructivo*. Buenos Aires: Poseidón, 1944, 931–935.
- 60 *Idem*, 932.
- 61 *Ibidem*, 932.
- 62 See the Berdía articles mentioned in note 47.
- 63 Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, op. cit., 931–932.
- 64 *Idem*, 933. Italics as in the original.
- 65 Patricia Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013, 177.
- 66 Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, op. cit., 935.
- 67 *Idem*, 935.
- 68 See note 48.
- 69 Torres-García et al., *La decoración mural del pabellón Martirene de la Colonia Saint Bois*. Montevideo: Asociación de Arte Constructivo, 1944; as quoted in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 20.
- 70 Torres-García, “El Problema de la decoración mural: Contestando al señor Herrera Mac Lean”, *Marcha*, 15 October 1944.
- 71 Having been removed in 1972 for conservation purposes, these were subsequently destroyed by a fire at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1978. Catalogue Raisonné refs.: 1944.26 *The Sun*; 1944.27 *Pax in Lucem*; 1944.28 *The Fish*; 1944.29 *Form*; 1944.30 *The Tram*; 1944.31 *White Locomotive*; 1944.12 *Pachamama*.
- 72 All 35 panels are reproduced in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit. The Taller students that took part in the project were Augusto and Horacio Torres (Torres-García’s sons), Julio Alpuy, Gonzalo Fonseca, Daniel de los Santos, Julián San Vicente, Teresa Olascuaga, Manuel Pailós, Sergio de Castro, Alceu Ribeiro, Luis A. Gentieu, María Celia Rovira, Juan Pardo, Andrés Moscovich, Héctor Ragni, María Elena García Brunel, Josefina Canel, Esther Barrios de Martín, Daymán Antúnez and Elsa Andrada.
- 73 Interview with Maria Celia Rovira (2006) transcribed in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 71.
- 74 Interview with Maria Celia Rovira (2006), transcribed in *idem*, 72.
- 75 For a detailed overview of the controversy surrounding the murals, see *ibidem*, 22–26.
- 76 *Ibidem*, 101, 110.
- 77 See note 44.
- 78 *Ibidem*, 101, 110.

- 79 None of the available images consulted for this essay appear to show the murals at the time of their completion in 1944. Fernández and Lorente, the two former students of the Taller who, in 2006, voiced their reservations as to the project's success in his regard, were not part of the Saint Bois crew, having only joined the Taller years after its completion.
- 80 Catalogue Raisonné reference 1944.30.
- 81 Torres-García, "Lección 119 - Nuestro problema de decoración mural", *Universalismo Constructivo*, op. cit., 785.
- 82 Torres-García, *La regla abstracta*. Rosario, Argentina: Ellena, 1967, n.p. Originally written in 1946.
- 83 Guido Castillo, "Torres-García, fresquista", *Mundo Uruguayo*, February 1944.
- 84 Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 21.
- 85 See note 15.
- 86 Pedro Nel Gómez, "La pintura al fresco en América", *Sábado: Semanario para todos, al servicio de la cultura y la democracia en América*, 14 May 1949. [ICAA]
- 87 Diego Rivera, "Arquitectura y pintura mural", *Textos de arte*. Mexico D. F.: UNAM IIE, 1996, 197. Originally published in *The Architectural Forum*, January 1934. [ICAA]
- 88 Guillermina Guadarrama Peña, *La ruta de Siqueiros: Etapas en su obra mural*. Mexico D. F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2010.
- 89 Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit., 12.
- 90 Siqueiros, "Los vehículos...", op. cit.
- 91 Idem.
- 92 David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road", *New Masses (New York)*, 29 May 1934. [ICAA]
- 93 Siqueiros, "Los vehículos...", op. cit.
- 94 Idem.
- 95 Rivera's and Siqueiros' differences over fresco were only one aspect of a broader artistic, political and personal controversy between them over the 1930s. See Maricela González Cruz Manjarrez, *La polémica Siqueiros-Rivera: planteamientos estético-políticos 1934-1935*. México, D.F.: Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño, 1996.
- 96 Torres-García, "El arte mejicano", op. cit.
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- 98 Torres-García, "El arte de David Alfaro Siqueiros", op. cit., 11.
- 99 Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1942.28.
- 100 Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 25.
- 101 A 1942 project by architects Carlos Surraco and Sara Morialdo. Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 19.
- 102 Of the seven panels created by Torres-García for this mural programme, five follow the brief to use only primary colours with black contours, while a further two were created in the grisaille palette. The rationale behind this chromatic departure from the programme brief is not known. These two black and white panels, moreover, appear to have been a later addition, as at least one of them is dated November 1944, that is several months after the completion of the original project.
- 103 Josep Minguell Cardenyes. *Pintura mural al fresco*. Lleida: Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida, 2014, 172.

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