

# Art in Latin America

The Modern Era, 1820-1980

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# 9

## Indigenism and Social Realism

SIQUEIROS' *Peasant Mother* (1929), Diego Rivera's *Flower Day* (1925) and José Sabogal's *The Indian Mayor of Chincheros: Varayoc* (1925) [Pls 9.2,3,4], all belong to the broad current of *indigenismo*, which gained momentum during the Twenties and Thirties, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, and which was manifested in the 'rediscovery' and revaluation of native cultures and traditions, as well as in the use of Indian themes in literature and the visual arts, which are often articulated in terms of social protest.

These three paintings, however, present three distinct attitudes to their Indian subjects, attitudes which are partly, but not fully, conditioned by the official and unofficial 'indigenist' policies operative in Mexico and Peru respectively.

Siqueiros' *Peasant Mother*, while depicting an Indian woman and her child, does not emphasize the ethnic, but rather the woman's social condition as poor and exploited. Rivera's *Flower Day*, on the other hand, is more of a solemn celebration of contemporary native/mestizo life, while Sabogal's painting, depicting an Andean village leader, emphasizes connections with the pre-Spanish rulers of Peru, the Inca, through the traditional silver-bound staff of office he holds, and his proud and independent stance.

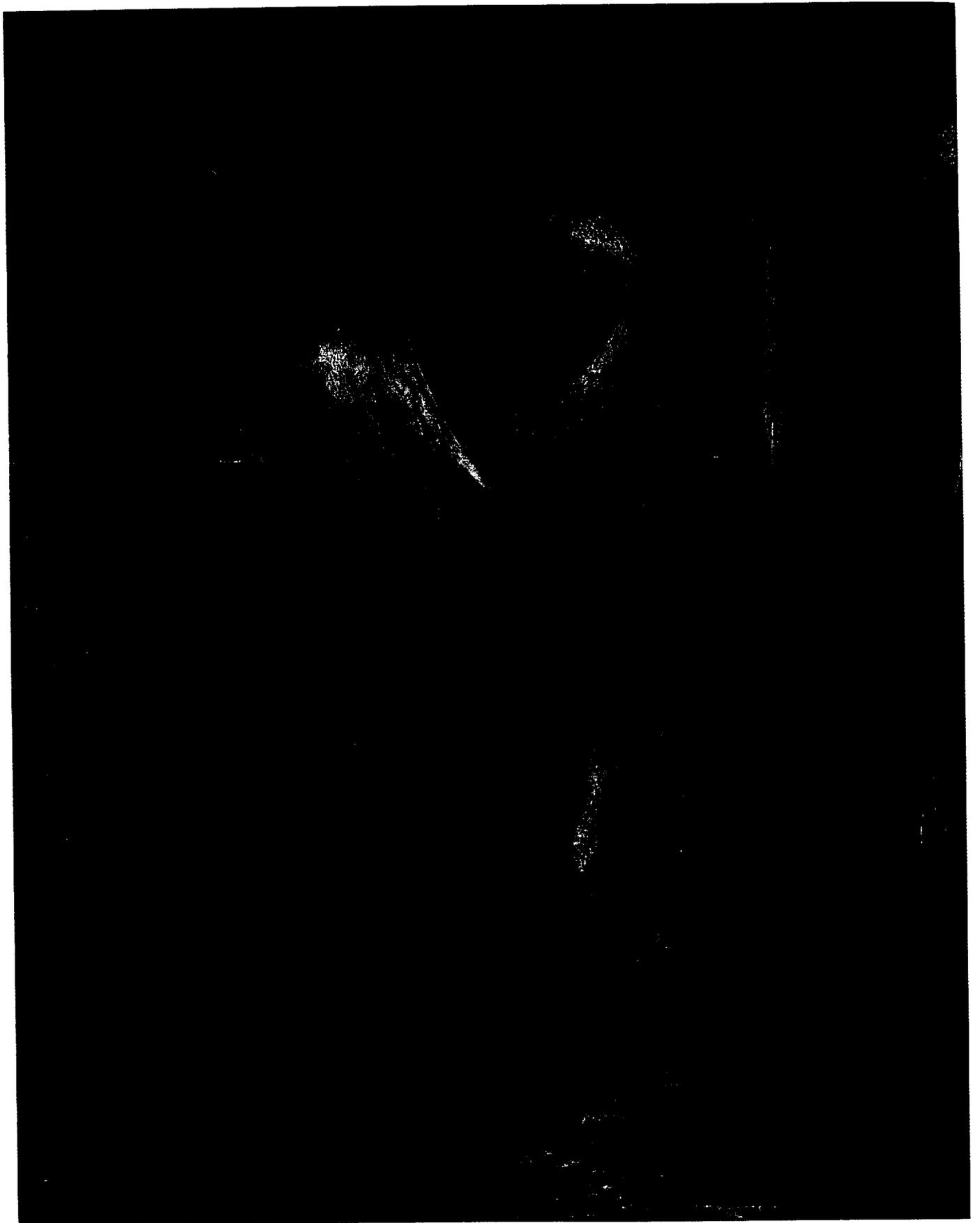
Diego Rivera's *Flower Day* – a theme which he repeated in later versions – is a reprise of part of the fresco in the Ministry of Education (1923–4), *Good Friday at Santa Anita Canal*, with the lily seller now seen from the front, and the Indian women kneeling before him in the posture of stone representations of the Aztec deity Chalchihuitlicue.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the most spectacular of the images in which Rivera expressed his fascination with Indian/mestizo way of life – a fascination which dates back to his first visit to the Maya region of Yucatán in 1921, and was strengthened by a visit the following year to Tehuantepec.

*Flower Day* is dark in tone, compared with the chalkier and more delicate colours of the mural, and it is massive rather than picturesque, its interlocked, precisely structured and almost geometrical forms recalling the architectural cubism of 1915–16. This emphasizes its static and hieratic, as opposed to decorative, character. The flower-seller bends under his flowers towards the women, tree-like, but also cross-like, evoking both shaman and Christ. The women's faces are generalized and simplified, with flat profiles, though the curving arm of the woman on the left recalls Picasso's substantial neo-classical figures. In *Flower Seller with Lilies* [Pl. 9.5]

9.1 Detail of Pl. 9.10.

9.2 José Sabogal, *The Indian Mayor of Chincheros: Varayoc*, 1925, oil on canvas, Museo de Arte de Lima.





9.3 David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Peasant Mother*, 1929, oil on canvas, 220×177 cm., Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City (INBA).



9.4 Diego Rivera, *Flower Day*, 1925, encaustic on canvas 147.4×120.6cm., Los Angeles County Museum of Art: L.A. County Funds.

## INDIGENISM AND SOCIAL REALISM

the great mass of lilies almost hides the male figure behind. Rivera possibly knew Aztec poems, like the following love song, where flowers are also a metaphor for poetry itself:

I've come to offer you songs,  
flowers to make your head spin.  
Oh, another kind of flower  
and you know it in your heart.

I came to bring them to you  
I carry them to your house  
on my back,

uprooted flowers  
I'm bent double with the weight of them  
for you.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly Rivera must have had a sense of the deep antiquity within the Mexican tradition of the image of the flower bearer.

*Indigenismo*, in Mexico, as 'the official attitude of praising and fostering native values', has taken several forms: notably the teaching in school and universities of pre-Columbian history and literature, and the excavation and restoration of major pre-Columbian cities like Teotihuacán, or Chichén-Itzá, culminating in the founding of the great Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City in 1964. It has become a major bulwark in the maintenance of a sense of pride in the national heritage and the idea of common roots for the nation in the Indian past. It has also been recognized that the mestizo majority as well as the Indian groups preserve much of native origin in their daily life: food, medicine, ritual, history and language.

But, as León-Portilla wrote in 1975, 'Unfortunately, the official praise of the Indian heritage has not always translated itself into coherent forms of action which would really make possible the development of the native communities. It is perplexing indeed that only a few effective steps have been taken to put an end to the abuses of which, for centuries, the Indians have remained the principal victims.'<sup>3</sup>

A major influence on the new interest in the Indians, their past and the long history of that past before the Conquest had been Manuel Gamio, whose *Forjando Patria* (1916) was mentioned in chapter 7 in connection with ideas of national identity within the mural movement. Gamio, like Franz Boas, rejected the theory of inferior and superior races that had dominated American social science to account for the persistence of 'these two great social groupings', Spanish and Indians, living side by side in the same territory; '... the one, numerically inferior, presents an advanced and efficient civilization, the other, numerically the larger, displays a backward civilization.'<sup>4</sup>

Gamio undertook two major projects: an ethnographic survey of the population of the Valley of Teotihuacán, and the excavation and

9.5 Diego Rivera, *Flower Seller with Lilies*. 1943, oil on masonite, 150×119 cm., Collection Jacques and Natasha Gelman.



restoration of the great pre-Conquest city of Teotihuacán, the beginning of whose florescence dates back to the time of Christ. The restoration of the vast pyramids, murals and sculpture from Teotihuacán brought the achievements of the early Mexican civilizations to the forefront of public consciousness, now eager to claim them as part of the 'Mexican heritage'.<sup>5</sup> The ethnographic survey revealed that about 60 per cent of the population of the Valley was in fact Indian, the rest mostly mestizo. Gamio blamed the misery and backwardness in which most of them lived on poverty, poor diet and lack of education, and advocated land reform and the return of communal land holdings. Ninety per cent of the cultivable land, he found, was owned by a tiny fraction of the population (seven absentee landlords). There had, undeniably, been a disastrous decay of Indian civilizations, systematically suppressed by the Spanish, since the Conquest, but Gamio found that conditions had worsened considerably since Independence, particularly during the reforms of the 1850s, and under the dictatorship of Díaz. Although he recognized a continuation of the 'native cultures' of Anáhuac, he acknowledged aesthetic value only in their products, actively encouraging the production of 'folk' crafts: textiles, pottery, metal work and lacquer.

Gamio's conclusion was that in their own interests and in that of Mexico the Indians should be assimilated into the modern Mexican nation:

The extension and intensity that folk-loric life exhibits in the great majority of the population eloquently demonstrates the cultural backwardness in which that population vegetates. This archaic life, which moves from artifice to illusion and superstition, is curious, attractive and original. But in all senses it would be preferable for the population to be incorporated into contemporary civilization of advanced, modern ideas.<sup>7</sup>

This 'liberal-progressive' conclusion was to influence official indigenist policies for years to come, in the practice known as induced assimilation, although all too often the socio-economic basis of Gamio's argument was forgotten in subsequent discussions of the so-called 'Indian problem'.

Another tendency inherent in indigenism was to merge all Indian peoples together as one 'other' nation. Whereas in Peru and other Andean countries the Inca had in the years immediately preceding the Conquest introduced Quechua as a common language to the different groups and imposed thereby a measure of unity, in Mexico there were many different groups with different languages. In the Valley of Mexico, for instance, both Otomí and Náhuatl are spoken, and the Maya speak languages that are mutually incomprehensible.

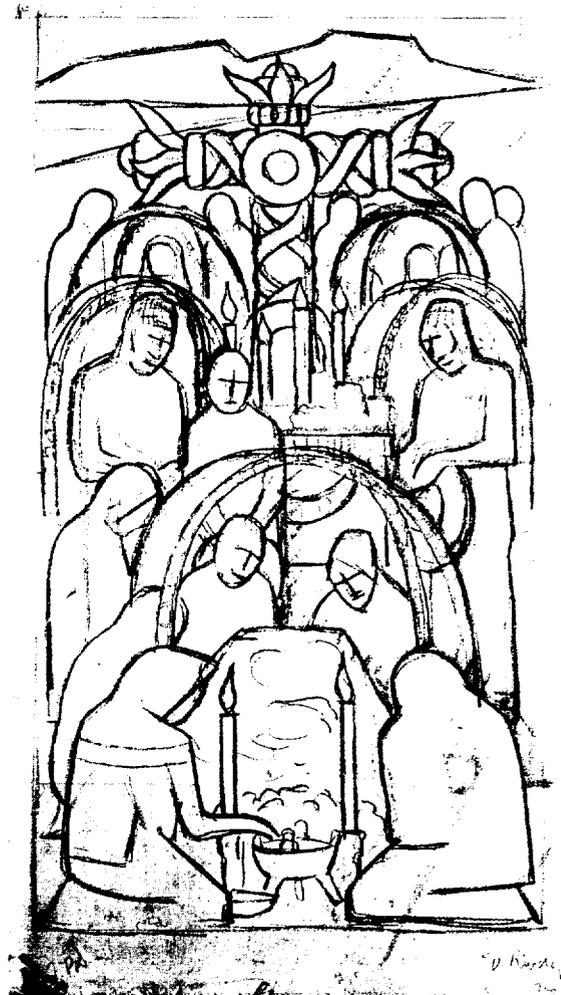
For the supporters of assimilation this was seen as a further obstacle. Eugenio Maldonado, for instance, in 'The Indian Problem' (1938) identified this as the first problem, and went on to elaborate on what he saw as the second problem, 'the reorientation of their

mental processes. Little has been accomplished along this line, above all because it implies a previous knowledge of the Indian mind and up to this date the various institutions which have undertaken to investigate the Indians' psychological processes have stumbled on two fundamental obstacles: insufficiency of staff devoted to such studies and the vastness of the population to be studied."<sup>8</sup> Such implicitly neo-colonial attitudes have been fought vigorously by Indian nations like the Yaqui, who finally won the right to self-determination, and by authorities like León-Portilla who recognized the economic and material basis of the social divisions, 'confinement to impoverished and often waterless lands; the frequent uncertainty of their titles of possession; the isolation of their communities; the absence of the more elementary public services; and the non-operating character of certain socio-political structures which have been imposed on them. To these may be added other injuries to their morale . . .'<sup>9</sup>

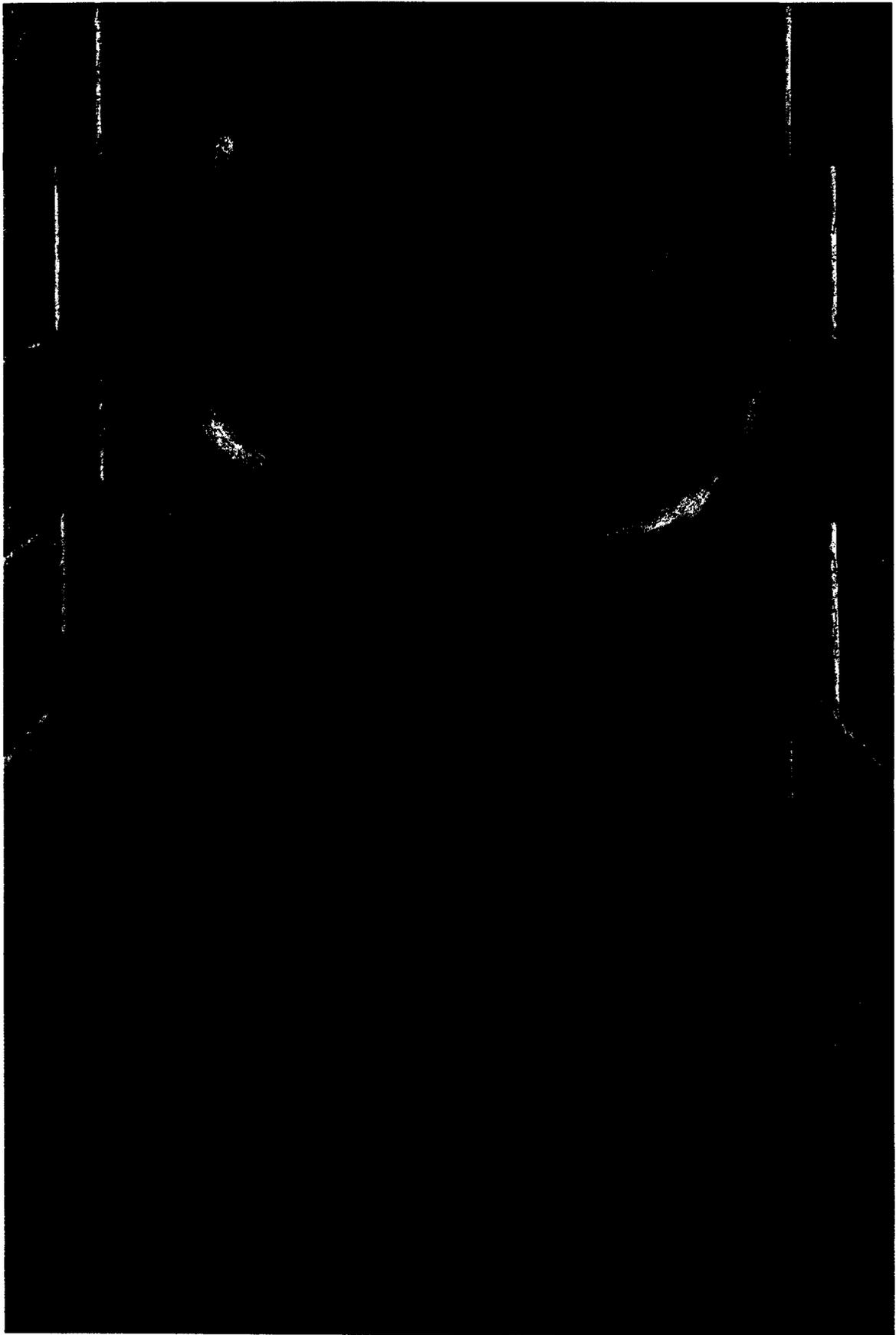
Rivera's love of the 'curious, attractive and original' in the life of the Indians [Pl. 9.6], to use Gamio's phrase, was not modulated by any concern for the official policies of assimilation; indeed only Orozco seems to have agreed with Gamio's conclusion. Rivera tended to treat injustice towards the Indian in terms of an historical rather than a contemporary context, emphasizing in the National Palace murals in particular the brutality of the Spanish Conquest, and depicting in the Ministry of Education murals the positive efforts of the Mexican Revolution in redistribution of land and improvements in education, while simultaneously celebrating the picturesque aspects of Indian culture.

The Revolution had transformed the consciousness of the country, but the changes and improvements in conditions were slow. Siqueiros' *Peasant Mother* was painted in the context of what was understood as a continuing revolution. A manifesto in *El Machete*, signed by Siqueiros as General Secretary of the Syndicate of Mexican Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors, had, following the rebellion late in 1923 of military-backed conservative forces, warned against the new and threatening power of the bourgeoisie 'who will seize the land and well being of your brothers with the very same weapons with which the Revolution had guaranteed them that land'.

*Peasant Mother* and its companion picture *Proletarian Mother* [Pl. 9.7] were painted in the consciousness that Mexico was still in a vulnerable transitional state, that the old order had not been fully defeated and that the worker and peasant were still exploited and needed to defend themselves and claim the promised reforms: 'You, the peasant on the land, fertilize the soil so that the fruit it bears is swallowed by the greed of profiteers and politicians, while you starve; . . . you, the worker in the city, keep the factories going, weave the cloth, and create with your own hands modern comforts to service prostitutes and drones while your bones shiver with cold. . . .'<sup>10</sup> Siqueiros does not restrict his strongly worded



9.6 Diego Rivera, *Day of the Dead in the Country*, 1925, charcoal, chalk and pencil on paper, 46.4x30 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Given anonymously.

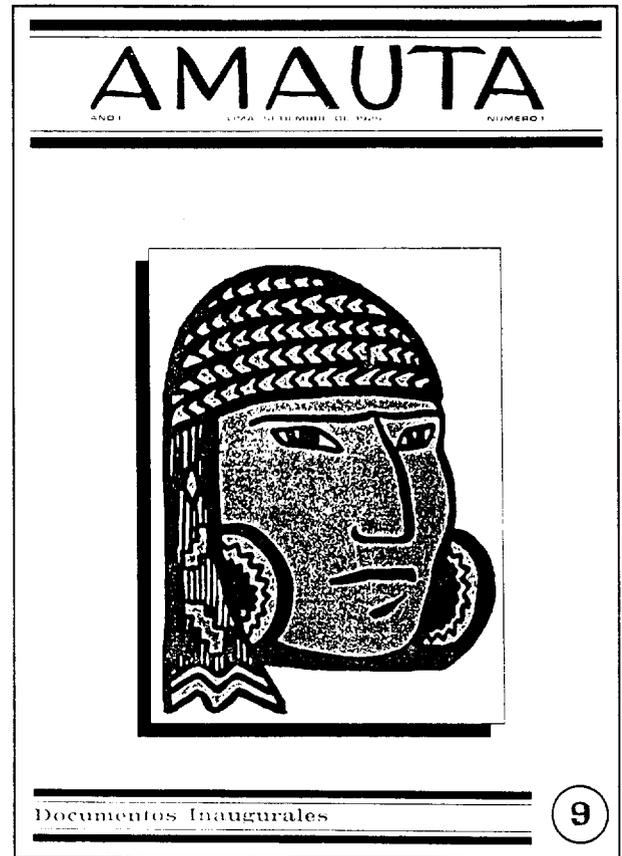


manifesto to social and political issues, however, but extends it to culture as an organic part of these: '... victory for the working classes will bring with it a unanimous flowering of ethnic art, cosmologically and historically transcendent in the life of our race, comparable to that of our wonderful autochthonous civilizations'. But he distinguishes this from the 'criollo and bourgeois approval (which is all-corrupting) of popular music, painting and literature: the reign of the "picturesque"':

What the relationship might be between the 'flowering of ethnic art', and the muralists themselves is not clear. Certainly Siqueiros saw his role as that of creating a propaganda art for the people. Unlike Rivera, Goitia or Francisco Leal, Siqueiros himself rarely painted Indians, but when he did, it was clearly in the context of social protest.

In Peru, where Sabogal painted his *Indian Mayor*, the situation was different, for although the condition of many of the Indians was no less desperate than in Mexico, there had been no social and political upheaval like the Mexican Revolution, and movements of reform or protest were much more circumscribed. 'Ten years after the popular Mexican uprising, the fullest and most intense social struggle in Peru was limited, geographically, to the capital, and in terms of objective, to achieve state recognition of the eight-hour working day.'<sup>11</sup> President Leguia's strong dictatorship lasted from 1919 until 1930, but during this period new political parties were founded: APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) and Mariátegui's Peruvian Socialist Party. Although Mariátegui founded his party on Marxist lines, it took as its model not European socialism but the Peruvian Indian commune, or *ayllu*, which was based on pre-Conquest Inca social structures. Both writers and artists in Peru were closely involved with Mariátegui and shared his ideas, contributing to his vanguard review *Amauta* [Pl. 9.8] (see Chapter 6).

Sabogal dominated indigenist painting in Peru during the Twenties and Thirties, and his painting more than any other 'incarnates the contradictions inherent in this movement'.<sup>12</sup> A further comparison would be useful at this point, between Sabogal and the nineteenth-century Peruvian artist Francisco Laso. Laso was the first academic artist in republican Peru to turn his attention to the local inhabitants. He travelled, between 1850 and 1853, through the Andes, where he made numerous sketches from life of local scenes and events, and of figures [Pl. 9.9]. The final paintings, however, were done in the studio, with the aid, too, of photographs. In paintings like *Rest in the Mountains* and *The Indian Potter* [Pl. 2.16], the figures are presented as highly dignified and static. There is little connection between Laso's painting and the picturesque *costumbrista* scenes of traveller-artists, and his treatment of his subjects runs counter to the attitude of the middle- and upper-class urban élite (creoles and some mestizos) which assumed the inferiority of the Indian. His emphasis on the individual character of the faces, as opposed to the undifferentiated mass, is quite singular, even if the effect of the smoothly academic style is to idealize and romanticize.



9.8 *Amauta*, September 1926, cover.

9.7 David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Proletarian Mother*, 1930, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City (INBA).

9.9 Francisco Laso, *Rest in the Mountains*, 1859, oil on canvas, 138×147 cm., Banco Central de Reserva del Peru, Lima.



The potter must surely be a portrait (though unnamed), but at the same time the shaded face shifts attention away from the man and on to the costume and the pre-Columbian pot, his occupational attribute.

The potter holds a Moche pot, though precisely what this signifies is unclear. In the mind of the viewer, though, a connection must be made between the Indian and the ancient Moche civilization (c. 500 AD). He seems, in other words, independent, owing nothing to the Spanish colonial settlers. In Laso's *Rest in the Mountains*, too, a Moche pot rests beside a magnificently cloaked figure, with his strange hat – perhaps this, and the potter's equally strange costume, were intended as authentic dress. A contradictory sense of timelessness and great antiquity emerges, not unlike that of European orientalist painters (it is interesting that in Paris Laso worked in the studio of the academic orientalist Delaroche).

Although there are no obvious social connotations in Laso's scenes, he does at the same time seem to resist too great a romanticization of the Andean Indian world, and his own activities as political reformer confirm that his interest was not just that of an observer of the picturesque.

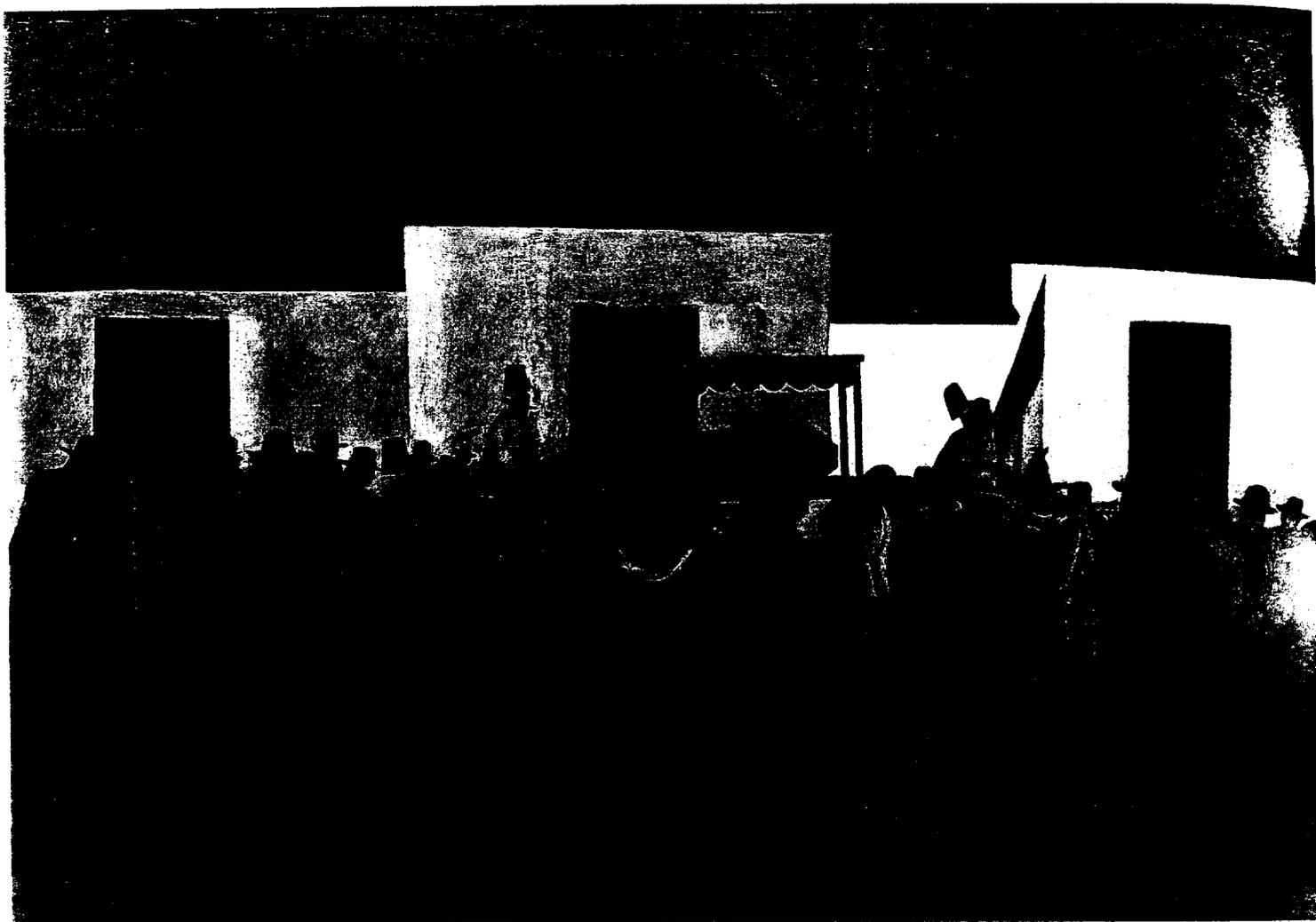
Even if Laso's dignified, noble and hieratic Indians obscured the conditions of exploitation in many Andean communities, they still challenged the bourgeois stereotype of the Indian as inferior. A strong tradition was subsequently to grow presenting the Indians as Inca – in other words presenting a past grandeur in the context of a nation that needed to assert its unity. Mirko Lauer suggests that one should speak of a 'Tahuantinsuyuism' as well as of 'indigenism' in painting and literature. He is strongly critical of this tendency: 'It was art of academic formalism which exploited the gold and the feathers, and which reproduced the hierarchical structure of its own society in an historical setting; its final achievement was to make the undernourished muscular, the poor rich, the ragged luxurious, and to create in the public mind a divide between the past and the present of the Andean people.'<sup>13</sup>

Sabogal's Indian is caught between these worlds – he is both of the present and of the past; perhaps an ideal figure, and yet one which is in many ways close to the Indians in the novels of Sabogal's contemporaries among Peruvian writers, such as Arguedas and Cirio Alegría. Rosendo Maqui, the village leader in Cirio Alegría's *Broad and Alien is the World* (1927), is a wise leader who guides his people and settles their disputes, and who lives in harmony with the natural world. But, unversed in the unscrupulous practices of the invaders (now the creole landowners), he fails to defend his village, is cheated by the law, and the novel ends with the landowner supported by an army moving to force the Indians off their land. In this novel, which admittedly reads rather like a tract, Alegría fictionalizes the then current practice of landowners, who annexed the Indians' land and forced them to work it in the condition of serfs (*gamonalismo*). Mariátegui argued, in 'The Indian Question' (Appendix, 9.1), that its root cause was this feudal system of land

tenure: 'A socialist critique examines and clarifies the problem because it looks for its roots in the Peruvian economy rather than in its administrative, legal or religious institutions, or in the plurality of its racial composition, or in cultural or moral terms. The Indian problem stems from our economy. It is rooted in the system of land ownership.'<sup>14</sup> The Indians and the laws formulated for their protection were in fact powerless against the great landowners. 'Land individually or collectively owned by Indians has by now been largely expropriated', and Mariátegui goes on, 'The assumption that the Indian question is an ethnic one is fostered by the most antiquated collection of imperialist ideas. The concept of racial inferiority served the white West's programme of conquest and expansion. To expect the emancipation of our indigenous peoples through the active hybridization of aboriginals and white immigrants is a piece of anti-sociological naïveté, conceivable only in the simple mind of an importer of merino sheep . . .' It is over the question of land that the Indian's struggle has continued, not only in Peru but throughout Latin America.

Sabogal's Indian figure appeals to 'Inca-ism', but at the same time the fact that he stands before a real Andes landscape, with a village, rather than in the blank portrait space of Laso's potter, links this Incaism to the land problem, if obliquely. Sabogal contributed to Mariátegui's magazine *Amauta*, but he was more concerned with cultural than social issues. His version of indigenism sought to shape cultural unity in Peru through the encouragement of popular art; he wrote articles about popular ceramics, carvings, and the carved wooden beakers (*Kero*) which remained unchanged in material and shape since Inca times [Introduction Pl. 4]. At the same time he eschewed the academicism then in favour for the heightened colour, emphatic outline and broad brush-strokes of Fauvism. After teaching at the School of Fine Arts from 1920, he was in 1932 appointed director;<sup>15</sup> under his guidance there grew up what was virtually a school of indigenist painting in Peru, including Julia Codesido, Camino Brent, Camilo Blas, Cota Carvallo, Jorge Segura, and the self-taught Mario Urteaga [Pl. 9.10]. *Indigenismo* was, however, a derogatory term, used, as Sabogal said, with malice; 'The term "indigenism" applied to Peruvians like Sabogal is a racist nickname and a reflection of cultural discomfort. It is a reaction against those artists and cultivated intellectuals, without quotation marks, who do not distance themselves from the people and the land. It is a protest against them for not perceiving the people and the land as a spectacle or as a mere thematic construct.'<sup>16</sup> In 1943 Sabogal was forced to resign the directorship, and, although continuing to paint, devoted much time to the rescue and encouragement of popular arts, on the verge, in many places, of extinction.

The relationship between indigenism and 'popular' arts should briefly be raised, for there is no doubt that in the most general terms the treatment of Indian themes in painting and in literature was accompanied by a revival of interest in popular and traditional 'arts



9.10 Mario Urteaga, *Burial of an Illustrious Man*, 1936, oil on canvas, 58.4×82.5 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Inter-American Fund.

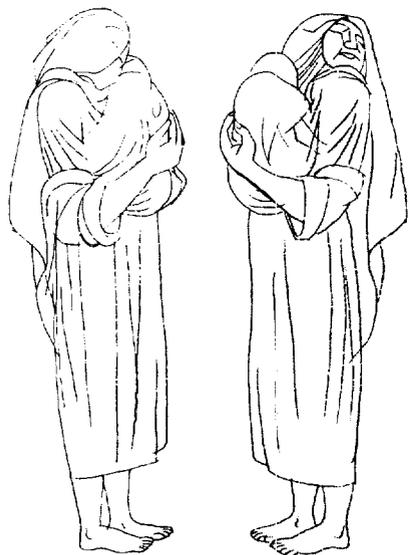
and crafts' – but in a selective way. In Mexico, popular art was officially welcomed as 'mestizo', as guaranteeing and strengthening the purposed unity of the Mexican nation<sup>17</sup> and in a sense proposing an interchange at the level of the cultural assimilation of Indian groups in Mexico, which was actively pursued from the Twenties. Similar revivals of folk art took place all over Latin America (see Introduction).

Indigenism in Mexico covers a multiplicity of different and even opposing attitudes. The syndicate, as we saw, placed great faith in native art, but warned against the bourgeois taste for popular art. The notion of indigenous art itself as 'popular' was certainly appealed to in terms of the muralists' rejection of easel painting and the individualist aesthetic of the bourgeoisie. Rivera surrounded himself with pre-Columbian and contemporary Indian art and artefacts, and objects of mestizo popular culture. His collection included Aztec, Maya, Zapotec and Mixtec sculpture and ceramics, and for this he built the special museum, the Anahuacalli; in his studio he kept an extraordinary collection of objects of ancient and recent origin. The walls and ceiling were hung with papier mâché

9.11 Francisco Goitia, *Way to the Tomb*, 1936, tempera on canvas, 119×91 cm., Private Collection.



9.12 Jesús Guerrero Galván, *I and My Future*, 1951, oil on canvas, 55.5×70.5 cm., Collection Pascual Gutiérrez Roldán.

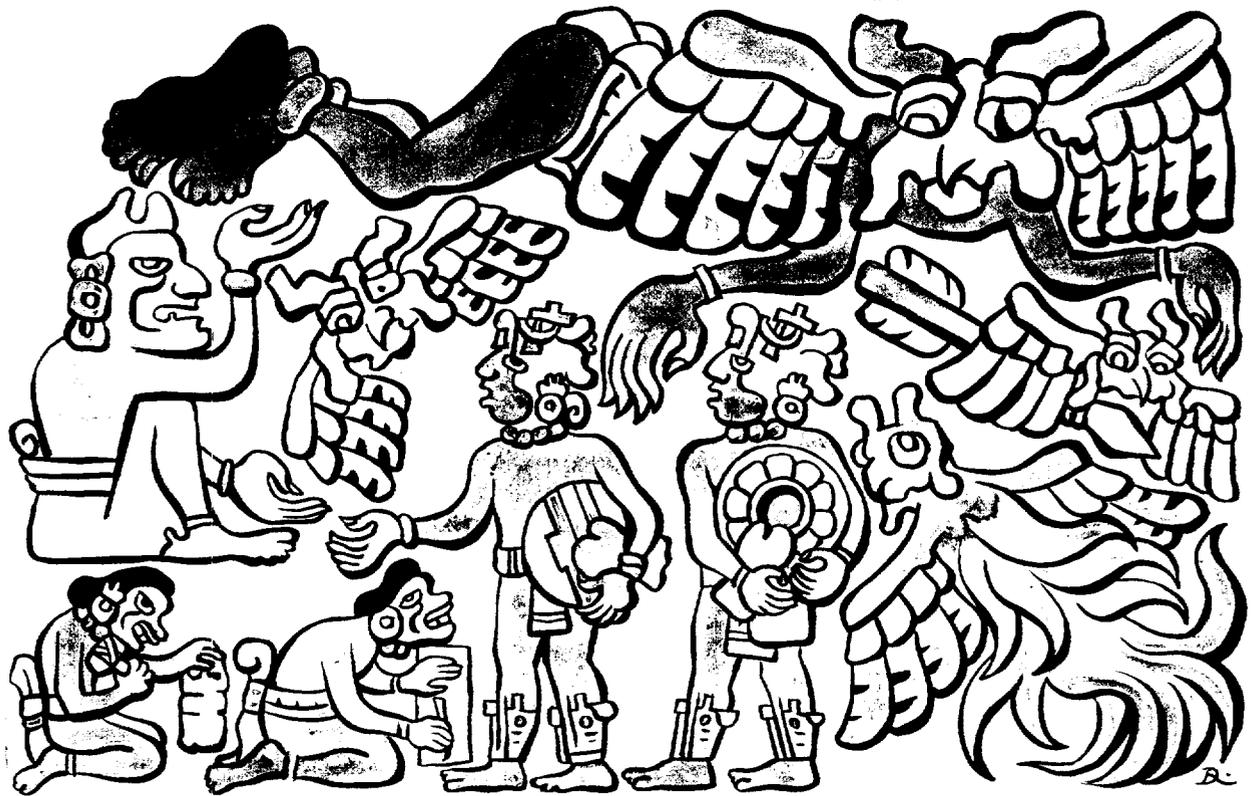


9.13 Xavier Guerrero, *Two Mothers*, 1945, black crayon on orange-red paper, 55.6×39.1 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Inter-American Fund.



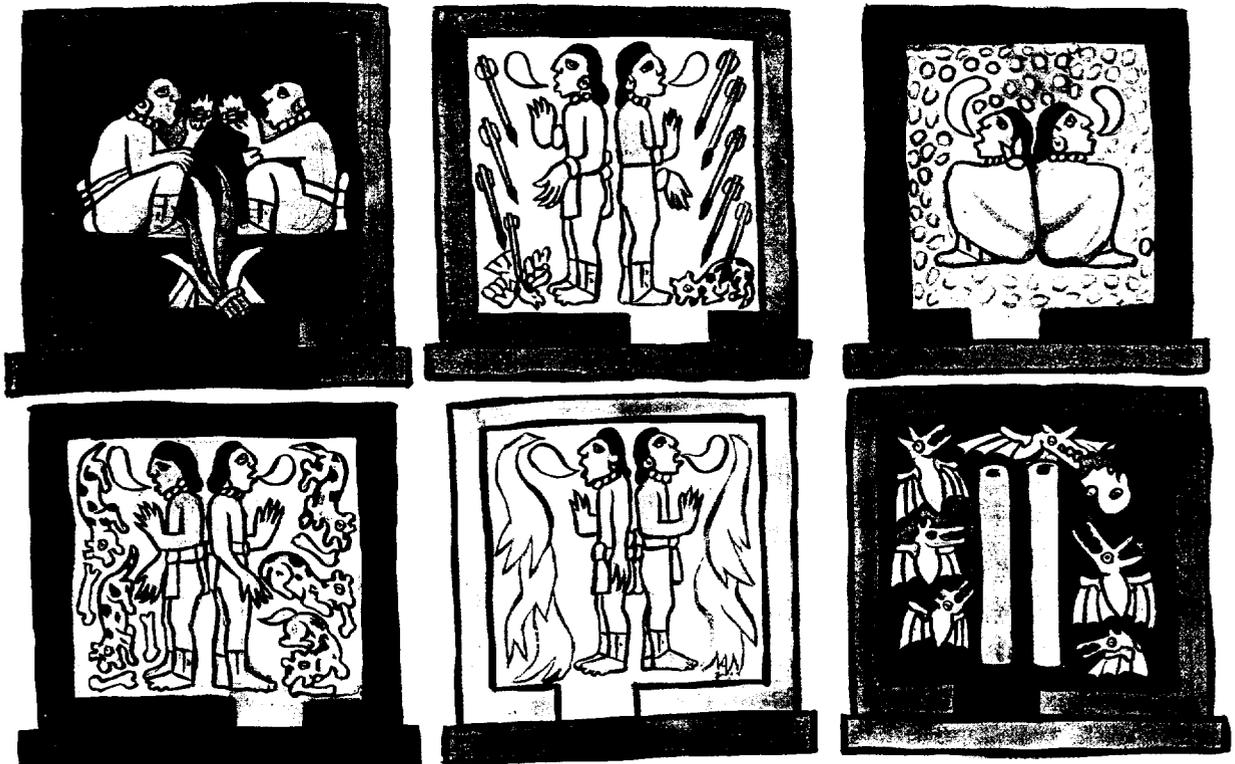
9.14 Roberto Montenegro, *Maya Women*, 1926, oil on canvas, 80×69.8 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1941.

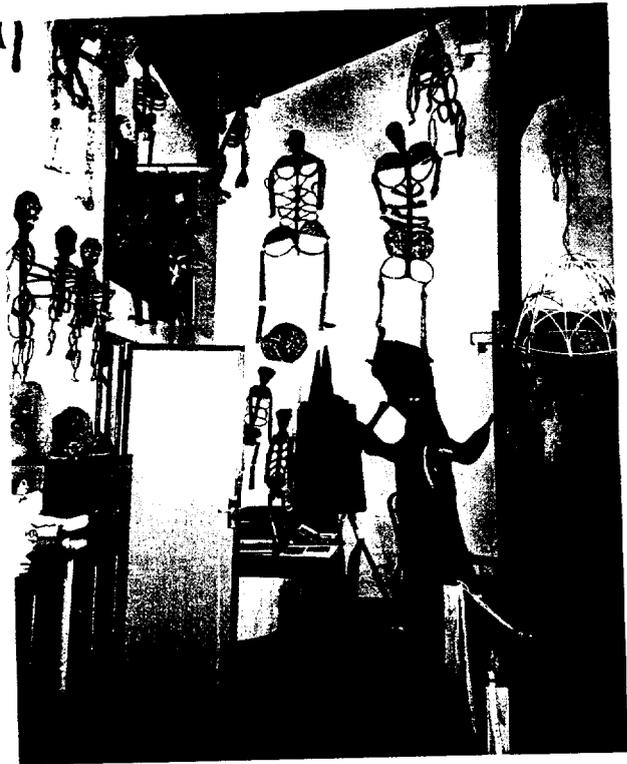
9.15 See Pl. 3.89a.



9.16 Diego Rivera, 'The Mansions of Xibalba', watercolour, Pl. XV from *Popol Vuh*, Museo Casa Diego Rivera, Guanajuato (INBA).

9.17 Diego Rivera, 'The hero twins are summoned by bat messengers to play the ball game with the lords of the underworld', watercolour, Pl. IX from *Popol Vuh*, Museo Casa Diego Rivera, Guanajuato (INBA).





9.18 The studio of Diego Rivera.

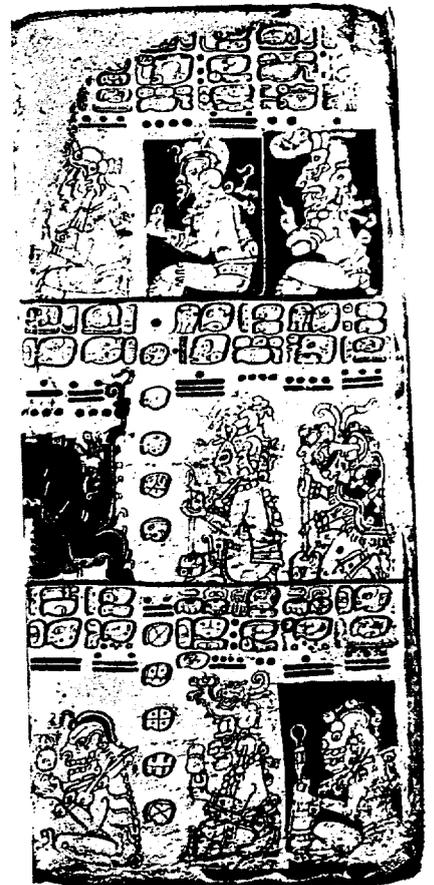
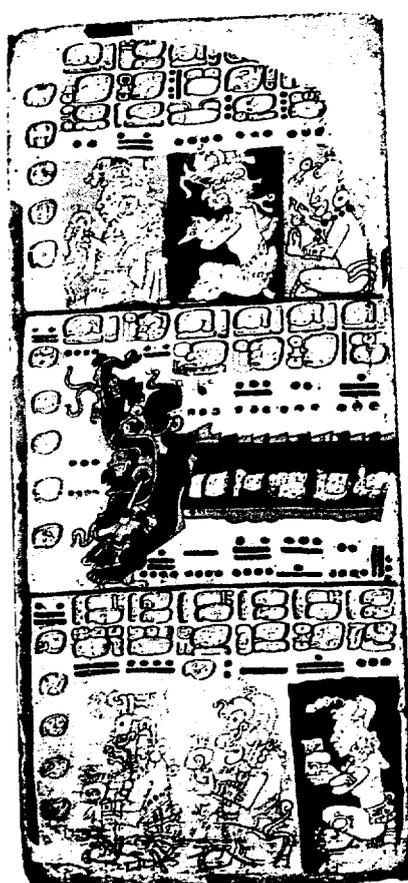
and wire skeletons (*calaveras*), there were huge Judas figures from street festivals, fine Guerrero masks, models of jaguars and other pre-Conquest deities, painted bowls, etc. [Pl. 9.18]. Yet it could be argued that his art never really assimilated this – unlike Frida Kahlo's, whose paintings in many senses absorbed the popular form of the *retablo* and actually became it. Rivera's remains at the level of aesthetic and intellectual admiration. On the walls of the National Palace in Mexico City he conjured a Utopian golden age in the scenes of pre-Columbian civilization. Yet Rivera perhaps was the painter most respectful of and most seriously immersed in the ideas, the cosmology, medicine, literature and art of the original inhabitants of America; in the series of watercolour illustrations he made, for example, for the *Popol Vuh*, the great Quiché Maya account of the creation of the world and of man [Pls 9.16,17], he attempted to stay close to pre-Columbian artistic sources. He looks, for instance, to the native screenfold books, although he did not necessarily rely exclusively on Maya sources like the Dresden Codex [Pl. 9.20], drawing as much on Toltec pictographs, like the Laud screenfold [Pl. 9.19].

But at the same time he could be accused of generalizing the contemporary Indians he depicts, as in *Flower Day*, of rendering them as little more than tokens – without individual character. More actively engaged, perhaps, with the problems and contradictions



9.19 Page from the Laud Codex. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

9.20 Illustrations from the Dresden Codex, Sachsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden.



9.23 (facing page top right) Marcello Pogolotti, *Capitalism*, n.d., oil on canvas, 92.5×73 cm., Museo Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Havana.

## INDIGENISM AND SOCIAL REALISM

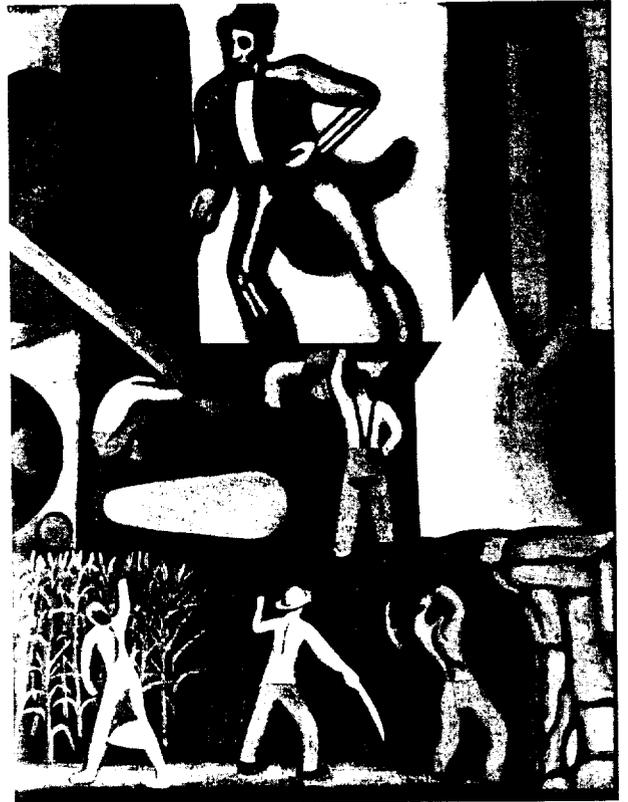
inherent in indigenism were members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, who went to consult León-Portilla in the late 1950s not only about Mexican history, but about the Náhuatl communities in Mexico.<sup>18</sup> Their prints and engravings represent in many ways a closer and more informed involvement with the issues raised by 'indigenism'.

Siqueiros' refusal to separate indigenism from social protest is found elsewhere in Latin America – in Ecuador, for instance, where Egas, Guayasamín and Eduardo Kingman all produced works critical of social conditions [Pls 9.21,22]. They often portrayed tragic figures, frequently women in mourning, which relate quite closely to the expressionist work of Käthe Kollwitz. Guayasamín tended to concentrate on urban subjects, as in *The Strike*, while Kingman, in the large painting *Los Guandos* whose oppressed figures are



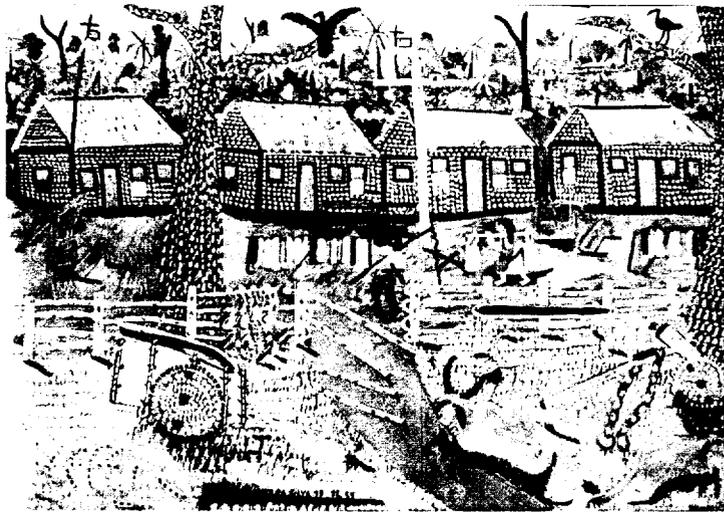
9.21 Camilo Egas, *Indians*, 1926, oil on canvas, 42×70 cm., Museo de Arte Moderno, Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Quito.

9.22 Oswaldo Guayasamín, *The Strike*, 1940, oil on canvas, 141×210 cm., Fundación Guayasamín, Quito.



9.24 (below) Eugênio de Proença Sigaud, *Accident at Work*, 1944, 132×95 cm., Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro.





9.25 José Antônio da Silva, *The Cotton Harvest*, 1948, oil on canvas, 50×101 cm., Museu de Arte de São Paulo.

9.26 José Antônio da Silva, *Repouso (Fazenda)*, 1955, oil on canvas, 70×99.8 cm., Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

9.27 José Antônio da Silva, *Enchanted Waterfall*, 1957, oil on canvas, 25×49.5 cm., Collection João Marino, São Paulo.  
The widespread success of self-taught naïve artists all over Latin America, like José Antônio da Silva, runs parallel to the success of 'popular' art.

9.28 José Antônio da Silva, *Sugar Factory*, 1948, oil on canvas, 50×100 cm., Collection João Marino, São Paulo.



crammed into the lower edge of the canvas, expressed great anger at the condition of peasant serfdom.

Throughout Latin America during the 1930s there was a similar movement among groups of artists towards art with a social theme. Lasar Segall, himself an immigrant, coming from a background of German Expressionism, treated the theme of immigration in paintings and engravings; among his most striking and original works, though, are the engravings he made of the street life of Rio de Janeiro, its cafés, prostitutes and sailors [Pls 8.23,24].

Cândido Portinari was involved in both mural and easel painting. He painted murals for the Ministry of Education in Rio de Janeiro, and in 1941 a *Discovery of the New World* for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. During the '30s, he based a number of canvases on coffee plantation workers and miners, which range from the depiction of whole scenes, as in *Coffee* [Pl. 9.29], which won a prize at the Carnegie Institute in the USA in 1935, to studies of individual figures, which are conceived as paintings of types rather than portraits, as in *The Mestizo*.

9.29 Cândido Portinari, *Coffee*, 1935, oil on canvas, 131×195.3cm., Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro.