

CONTEXTUALIZING “THE ARTISTS’ STATEMENT”: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER 1971

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Jean Charlot, the French-born Mexican muralist and chronicler sans pareil of Mexico’s mural efflorescence during the 1920s, characterizes the contemporary U.S. mural movement, defined as beginning in the 1960s, as “a mural renaissance similar in many ways to ours, dissimilar in its locale, the multiracial Babylons of the United States.”¹ That affirmation and confirmation of an artistic continuum or legacy is what subtends this paper’s thesis that Mexican muralism of the twentieth century informs more contemporary U.S. muralism. Our ensuing in-depth examination of one textual document, referred to as “The Artists’ Statement,” will demonstrate that our argument extends as well to critically important written declarations, manifestos, and statements issued in connection with muralism north and south of the U.S.-Mexico border. The paper’s title betrays a threefold historical vantage point: of retrospection to the 1920s, to modern and contemporary reflections through 2000, and to futuristic projections beyond 2007.

The contours and parameters of Chicago’s contemporary community mural movement—dating from the late 1960s to the end of the twentieth century and beyond—are drawn in bold relief in “The Artists’ Statement,” a critically important primary document and the first manifesto of that movement. Unsigned and undated, this sixteen-page typescript manifesto, composed on commonplace paper and merely stapled together, foregrounds ethnic visual culture, particularly Afro-American and white ethnic² mural art; the misconstrued concept of a “people’s art;” murals understood as a museum of public art born of and located in the city’s streets; politically and socially relevant activist art held up as a mirror to societal miseries; art’s true universality as a language of communication; cooperation between cultural workers in different media; and murals executed and exhibited indoors within the culture and setting of the gallery or museum, spaces that Brian O’Doherty [a.k.a. Patrick Ireland], artist/writer and one-time director of the Visual Arts Program for the National Endowment for the Arts, characterized as the “white cube.”³

Moreover, the greater body of the manifesto consists of individual biographies with corresponding artistic and ideological position statements. It must be stressed that this text is augmented with the authors’ collective opening statement. Mural painters

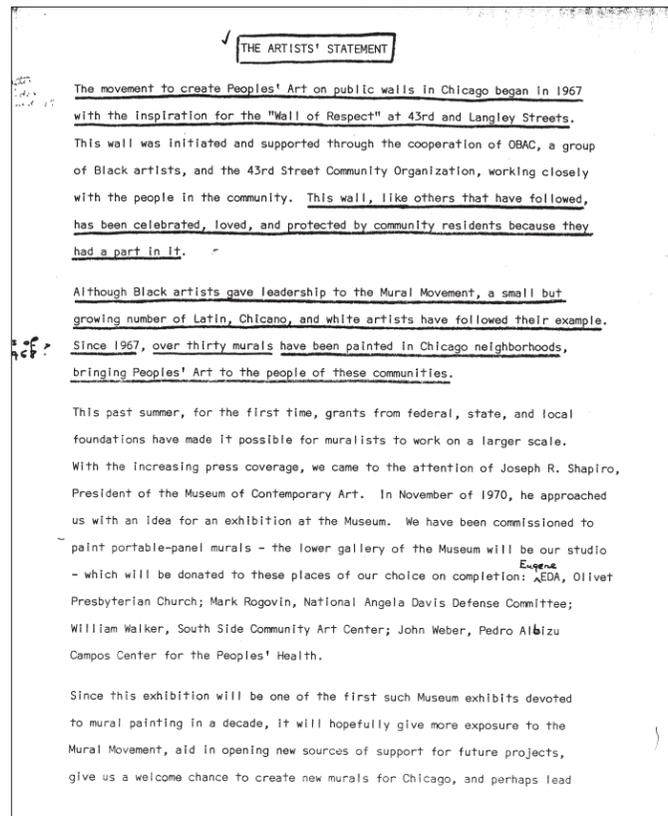


Fig. 1. A page from “The Artists’ Statement,” the manifesto issued in 1971 in the context of the burgeoning contemporary community mural movement launched in Chicago.

Eugene Eda, Mark Rogovin, William Walker, and John Weber, numbering among Chicago’s most *engagé* artists, met on several occasions between September 1970 and January 1971 at the South Side Community Art Center⁴ to collectively compose their manifesto. Rogovin issued a first draft, and together all four contributors reviewed and edited that version to achieve a final product.

In February 1971, they issued their nonillustrated manifesto in mimeographed form for general distribution on the occasion of the *Murals for the People* exhibit held in Chicago’s original Museum of Contemporary Art.⁵ In their collective statement that appears on the opening page of the text, the artists tell us about the genesis of these murals that were first painted inside the “white cube”:

Since 1967, over thirty murals have been painted in Chicago neighborhoods, bringing Peoples’ Art to the people of these communities...With the increasing press coverage, we came to the attention of Joseph R. Shapiro, President of the Museum of Contemporary Art. In November of 1970, he approached us with an idea for an exhibition at the Museum. We have been commissioned to paint portable-panel murals—the lower gallery of the Museum will be our studio...[fig. 1]

Afro-American muralists Eda and Walker collaborated with their kindred spirits, white ethnic artists Rogovin and Weber, in conceiving and broadly defining a national mural movement. Its role would be further examined and articulated, manifesto-like, in two contemporary publications: *Cry for Justice*, a booklet/pamphlet edited by Leslie F. Orear, in 1972; and *Mural Manual*, a book written by Mark Rogovin and Marie Burton, in 1973. These are significant primary documents in their own right that succeeded and owed a debt to “The Artists’ Statement.” The prescribed role for muralism would manifest itself as a largely discursive program, which was actualized through “call-and-response” reciprocal speech acts. These were prompted and elicited by the highly charged human drama unfolding within the volatile arena of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Thus, murals functioned as an ideological compass, engaging their public in a historical assessment of a troubled past and present, together with what promised to be a more propitious future. *Cry for Justice* defined the mural movement and articulated its purpose:

The mural movement...is a celebration of love, laced with anger; a communication of history focused on tomorrow; a record of the struggle re-strengthened by new purpose; a reception for the people’s heroes containing a challenge to be ourselves heroic. By finding and fulfilling this role, the mural movement has given new meaning to art, new meaning to artists. It has expanded the struggle for civil rights, for human rights, from the streets to the walls of the community, where it proudly holds a mirror up to human nature both as a record of the past and as a target for the future.⁶

For its part, *Mural Manual* delineates the broad contextual parameters:

In building a strong future for public art, we know that there will have to be a shift of priorities in this society. There will have to be a change from a wartime economy of bombs abroad to a peacetime economy serving the needs of the people at home—to an end to racism, to the building of decent housing, schools, child care centers, decent transportation systems, medical care for all,

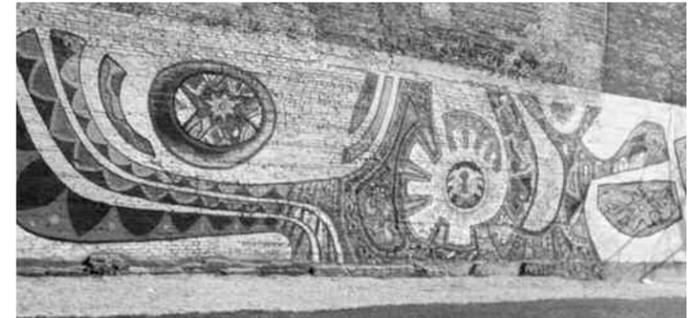


Fig. 2. Mario Castillo, *Metafisica*, 1968. Located at 1935 South Halsted Street, Chicago, once the site of the Pilsen community’s Urban Progress Center.

and more. We feel that artists can be of aid in bringing about such a change in priorities. This is the overriding reason for our commitment to mural painting and we dedicate this manual as a vehicle for you to join in working toward this goal.⁷

Arguably, a case could be made for intertextual discourse among “The Artists’ Statement,” *Cry for Justice*, and *Mural Manual*. A highly resonant title, *Cry for Justice* understandably elicits our compassion for those people and communities yearning for future palliative measures to compensate for and overturn present injustices. A possible and potential curative vehicle is the painted mural, as recommended by the authors of the self-help treatise, *Mural Manual*. These two publications “hear” the “call” of “The Artists’ Statement” and answer in concert with an amplified “response” that more thoroughly describes and explains the political and social milieu in which the community mural movement took root. Another four years would transpire before full textual justice could be paid to the cry of indignation. Providing the critically important, abbreviated history of contemporary muralism would be the purpose of the book *Toward A People’s Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, authored by Eva and James Cockcroft with John Weber, and published in 1977. From this landmark book we learn that the group that sparked the beginnings of the mural movement was the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC; pronounced *obasi*, the Yoruba word for chieftain).⁸ OBAC’s *Wall of Respect* was “like a single spark setting off a prairie fire.”⁹ The year was 1967. By 1971, that short-lived mural painting would be destroyed.¹⁰

In the midst of this early Black muralism, a Mexican artist, Mario Castillo, would look to his own cultural patrimony to paint, with the assistance of neighborhood youths, what is [probably the second Latino mural in Chicago, *Metafisica* (1968) [fig. 2].¹¹ In 1964, Castillo had executed Chicago’s first contemporary Latino mural at what is now Lane Technical College Preparatory High School, also the site for several

turn-of-the-twentieth-century and WPA interior murals. He was, however, living in Los Angeles from 1969 until 1973 during the period when “The Artists’ Statement” was conceived and issued and when the exhibit *Murals for the People* was mounted.¹² Interestingly, only one Latino artist, José Gamaliel González, acknowledged that he had attended the exhibit.¹³ Other prominent Chicago-based Latino muralists—José Guerrero, Raymundo Patlán, and Marcos Raya—not only failed to visit the exhibit but appear largely oblivious to the content and publication of “The Artists’ Statement.”¹⁴ That is not to say that the document did not ultimately have a degree of subliminal influence, considering the prominence of the authors as individual muralists and organizers within the contemporary community mural movement. Furthermore, all of the named Latino muralists knew and interacted with the scribes of our featured manifesto.

William Walker, the prime mover, or “elder statesman,” among Chicago’s muralists, had migrated north from Tennessee, bringing with him a profoundly humanistic, socially inclusive, and purposeful art. His compassionate and thoughtful ethos becomes palpably encoded in the entire “Artists’ Statement” and, as we might expect, most tellingly in his own carefully cadenced, albeit sometimes apocalyptic and proselytizing, rhetoric:

My first painting projects were in Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee. It was in Memphis that I first became aware of the fact that Black people had no appreciation for art or artists—they were too busy just struggling to survive. I then decided that a Black artist must dedicate his work to his people. At the same time, he must retain his relevance and integrity as an artist.

In questioning myself as to how I could best give my art to Black people, I came to the realization that art must belong to ALL people. That is when I first began to think of public art...

The artist-to-people communication is the kind of relationship that would place the artist and his art in a position of respect, pride, and dignity, all of which the artist should have. These views are not based on the feelings of an idealist hoping for something that cannot be or believing in something that he has experienced, they are founded on the grounds of knowing from experience, of talking with people in a community during the time that the art project is in progress, of discussing the conditions of their problems and the world, and of realizing how art can become more relevant to the people of the world...

Art is also seen as a force designed to dethrone ignorance from its pedestal of influence in the affairs of man. These barbaric, irrational forces, born in ignorance, create a state of terror that is a luxury which no man can afford.

People are now realizing that public art is essential because it is relevant to each of them. Art is a universal language, destroying the barriers that stand so firm before man. The artist and his art are warning man of the dangers ahead. If man fails to understand this, total destruction may surely come.¹⁵

Walker’s acknowledgement of the daily struggles waged by African Americans is a testament to his humanity. He assigns art its relative importance, inferring that his potential audience will be able to relate to something of an artistic nature if what he does can resonate for them as they confront their daily challenges. Walker is convinced that the mural art he creates becomes relevant to Black people and non-Blacks, alike, because he is tapping into their “lived” experiences of a harsh daily existence. His approach borders on a phenomenological reading of the collective circumstances of his public’s lives. Walker characterizes art as a particularly effective communicative vehicle, both in the present moment and in the future.

Interrogating himself about his own relevance to people who were separated from him by culture and prejudice—introspection not necessarily required or expected of artists of color—John Weber plumbs his rigorous undergraduate training as an historian at Harvard to claim his rightful place in the sweeping progressive movement of public art. His individual artistic voice thus becomes invested with the sentiments expressed by a communal voice that he is careful to heed where he paints, an experience approaching “a [religious] conversion”:

My first outdoor mural was painted in 1969 in the courtyard of St. Dominic’s Church near the Cabrini-Green Housing Projects, working with a group of local teen-agers. The wall dealt symbolically with the Black Liberation struggle. It is called “All Power to the People.” In that project, for the first time, I was able to combine my life as an artist, a teacher, and a socially-politically involved person all in one activity.

Though I had worked with poor people, racial and ethnic minority groups for several years, and had been active in the civil rights and peace movements, as an artist I remained isolated, both despite and because of the political-social themes of my work.

While working on a long series of poem-paintings about the war in Viet Nam, I became convinced that more than a change of subject or style was necessary to break down the isolation of artists in marginality and irrelevancy. Painting the mural was an extraordinary experience—a conversion. I found that I was able to create an imagery which spoke directly to ordinary people, which was accepted as their own by people

separated from me by culture and by a long history of prejudice and oppression.

Many barriers can be crossed by an artist bringing commitment and vision to the work. The artist is transformed in the process of creating public art. He must abandon his private self-examination to speak as a citizen in society, and to become a voice for others. He is rewarded by becoming an artist for the people, by gaining a living relationship with the people.¹⁶

The concept of “people’s art”—an idea that has devolved or degenerated into a vague cliché—is demystified to a considerable extent by Weber’s words. He sheds light on the processual aspect of community art; that is, the importance of the artist working together with neighborhood people to establish “a living relationship with [them]” within a particular place or locus. Anthropologist Victor Turner referred to this reciprocity between place and the collective labor undertaken in that place as *communitas*. He sought to “distinguish [the] modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living’.”¹⁷

Asserting his own identity as a Black artist, Eugene Eda wants to create murals that deliberately reflect the Black experience. To execute “works of art for the people...on the most conspicuous buildings in deprived areas” is to subscribe to a spirit of *communitas*. Of course, Eda’s rhetorical strategy is more overtly militant than Walker’s, and not unlike that of the Mexican muralists of the 1920s, particularly David Alfaro Siqueiros’s ideologically saturated platform. Eda’s words strike a strident chord:

In art, there is a need for a more truthful, more cohesive, and more faithful relation to one’s culture and one’s background. Black artists must not be imitative of the white men’s art today. They must have their own values, stemming from Black men’s experiences.

As a Black artist, I will work on the most conspicuous buildings in deprived areas. I will produce Black Art whose absolute values will speak for themselves, without philosophical or literary mannerisms. I will produce art that is about the life, history and experiences of Black people, that is both educational and functional, and that creates a true copy of visible and humanistic nature in action.

I want my ideas to be received as I perceive them. Since I paint for and identify with the masses of Black people, I am creating a realism so that nobody will fail to receive the impact of my ideological and aesthetic message.

I repudiate all “System Art”¹⁸ because it has no meaning or function for Black people; it is more an expression

of personal satisfaction. I praise monumental functional art in all its forms. My greatest efforts are toward the production of functional, ideological works of art for the people; I believe that the appeal of all art should be universal.¹⁹

To an extent, Eda, too, is a proselytizer. He is intolerant of self-indulgent art that speaks only to a select few. He strives to reach an inclusive public with “universally” meaningful imagery, devoid of “philosophical or literary mannerisms.” Yet he’s also intent on communicating in an almost nationalistic sense with fellow Blacks, perhaps at the expense of non-Blacks who do not inhabit the buildings he privileges, or who reside outside the neighborhood in which he paints. Acknowledging his own notably unique hands-on Mexican experience under the tutelage of *maestro* David Alfaro Siqueiros, Mark Rogovin begins his biographical profile fourteen pages into “The Artists’ Statement”:

For two summers, 1965 and 1966, I traveled through Mexico observing and photographing murals. In the summer of 1967, I worked as assistant to the distinguished Mexican muralist, David Siqueiros. This great artist was constructing the largest mural in the world, ‘The March of Humanity’. It included painting as well as painted steel sculpture.

In the last semester of my senior year at the Rhode Island School of Design, in 1968, I was invited by Siqueiros to rejoin his international team of artists to work again on the mural...²⁰

Emerging from Siqueiros’s direct circle of influence, Rogovin is keenly mindful of the critical importance of murals [such as in the Poliforum, Mexico City], underscoring their significant place and purpose alongside works of art shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and in that vibrant city’s galleries.

Notably, Rogovin is equally sensitive to cross-pollination among different media, visual and extra-visual, in the public sphere. He appreciates meaningful precedents outside of muralism in the global history of politically and socially engaged art, recognizing insightfully that multiple artistic media can contribute to the attainment of social justice.

While driving through Chicago, one might suspect that the only places to view fine art works are the Art Institute or one of the Ontario Street galleries. But far from these locations are new art centers. Over thirty murals have been painted on walls throughout the city. No admission prices, no dress codes, no expensive bus rides are needed to see these vital, exciting works of art. Themes of the

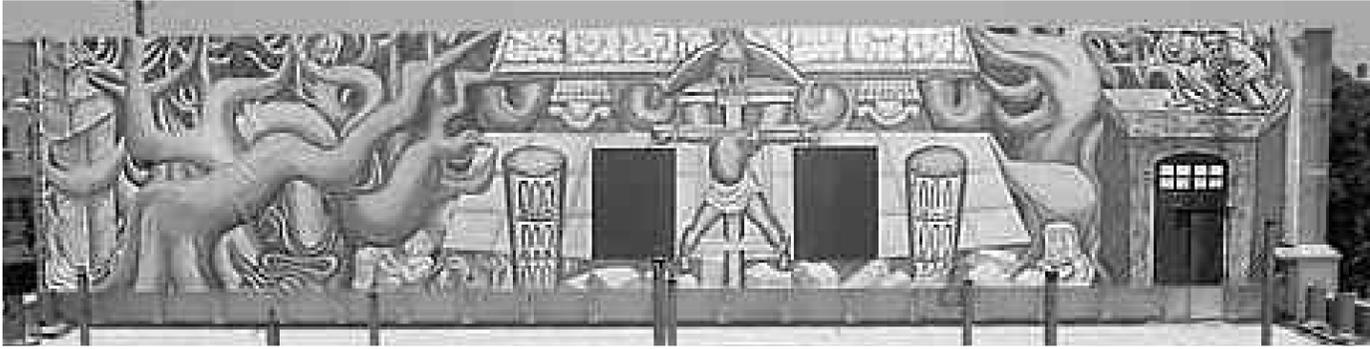


Fig. 3. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *América tropical*, 1932 (currently undergoing restoration). Olvera Street, Sonora Town, Los Angeles.

wall murals call attention to some of the most pressing issues in society today...

We need huge brigades of artists to take to the streets and move along beside the people in their struggles.

While I am anxious that mural painting become a medium that can involve me totally, I consider the mural to be only one outlet for the painter. I insist that others working in ALL cultural fields look at their own works and question how they can become a meaningful vehicle for reaching others.

We have joined together through the necessity that demands that all creative forces work together for the benefit of men and women in struggle. Whether it be painting, sculpture, theater, or literature, all can become a VITAL public art form and an aid to the peoples' struggles.²¹

Looking at a historical context, I would argue that "The Artists' Statement," understood as a collectively authored artistic manifesto, is anticipated and informed by various other artists' position statements issued long before 1971. As early as the fall of 1920, Mexican artist Carlos Mérida foreshadows Eugene Eda's insistence on producing Black art with his own call for "a totally American art":

My painting is fired with an intimate conviction that it is imperative to produce a totally American art. I believe that America possessed of such a glorious past, with both nature and race original in character, will doubtless breed a personal artistic expression. This is a task for the prophetic vision of the young artists of America.²²

Likewise, as soon as he adopted the view that privileging "Negro art" was a key issue, the young Siqueiros anticipated the combined sensibilities of both Eda and Walker by some fifty years. In this respect, he wrote from Barcelona that "Understanding the wonderful human depth in 'l'art nègre'

or 'primitive art' in general, has given the visual arts a clarity and depth lost four centuries ago along the hazy path of error..."²³ Carmen Fonserrada, a scarcely known compatriot and contemporary of Siqueiros's and Mérida's, would likely have been somewhat at odds with O'Doherty's splendidly articulated thesis in defense of the "white cube." Fonserrada also would have been simultaneously enthusiastic about "The Artists' Statement" and the artist-authors' insistence on a communion with "the daily life of the people."

Initially published in *Revista de Revistas*, Mexico City (October 28, 1921), Fonserrada's arguments centered on the idea that:

The destiny of a work of art should not be to end in a museum, small or big, public or private...Works of art should not lose contact with the daily life of the people. The epochs that produced great mural painting seem gone forever...it is for us artists AN OBLIGATION to create a fit setting for the art of Mexico.²⁴

Fonserrada's emphasis on muralism as a near-road map for the future trajectory of Mexican art's renaissance anticipates the same disposition and inclination on the part of the authors of "The Artists' Statement" who, many years later, would usher in a harvest of community murals executed largely in the outdoor setting of city streets.

Unquestionably, it was another manifesto, "A Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles"—drawn up in 1922 by Siqueiros and signed by the entire membership of The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors—that most closely portends the spirit of "The Artists' Statement," and to which I alluded earlier when invoking Siqueiros's rhetorically resonant ideological influence:

The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors directs itself to the native races humiliated for centuries; to the soldiers made into hangmen by

their officers; to the workers and peasants scourged by the rich; and to the intellectuals who did not flatter the bourgeoisie. We side with those who demand the disappearance of an ancient, cruel system in which the farm worker produces food for the loud-mouthed politicians and bosses, while he starves...We proclaim that at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people; art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction which it is today, but should aim to become a fighting, educative art for all.²⁵

Two years after "A Declaration..." was issued, Siqueiros and fellow artist Xavier Guerrero rendered two fitting visually trenchant codas to the manifesto, the woodcuts *Kneeling Worker*, *Flagellated and Bleeding* and *The Parceling of the Land*, both published in *El Machete*, the syndicate's own newspaper and the official organ of the PCM.²⁶

Then, in 1932, Siqueiros revisited the theme of the exploited worker in his remarkable mural, *América tropical* [fig. 3], the first to be painted in the U.S. by a prominent Mexican muralist. Overlooking Olvera Street in Sonora Town, the Mexican barrio of Los Angeles, it is now undergoing restoration almost a century later. The "screaming eagle with spread wings dominat[ing] the modern Calvary"²⁷ is perched immediately above a crucified indigenous figure, symbolizing the artist's indignation over U.S. sociopolitical imperialism. Wishing to underscore economic, racial, and social exploitation—what Mexican agricultural workers were since then experiencing in the U.S.—Siqueiros stated that he "painted a man...crucified on a double cross, which had, proudly perched on the top, the eagle of North American coins."²⁸ Around 1939, the Chicago-based New Deal muralist Mitchell Siporin acknowledged "the amazing spectacle of the modern renaissance of mural painting in Mexico," adding that his (fellow) Midwestern contemporaries were "at work on a native epic in fresco return[ing] to Giotto, Masaccio, [and] Orozco..."²⁹ Some thirty-two years thereafter, the muralist authors of "The Artists' Statement" would become the direct artistic beneficiaries and descendants of Siporin and his midwestern contemporaries.

Siqueiros himself would seem to have the last words to add to our historical continuum, encapsulating "The Artists' Statement" from its issuance in 1971, through its pre-1971 antecedents, and beyond 1971 to its potential legacy: the time frame cited in this essay's subtitle. Calling to task the ideology shaping the "white cube," Siqueiros would remind us during the summer and winter of 1962 (while in prison at Lecumberri) that the

"living art of México" is intended to speak to a mass audience through its own figurative "social language":

In my opinion mural art cannot be judged on either a national or international scale by the canons of movable art, of easel painting, of painting in its function of private pleasure, because our art is public, for the multitudes, and it speaks a different social language, with its own particular style and form...the living art of Mexico.³⁰

Also, in 1962, Siqueiros wrote.... "The inescapable problem for us was to express ourselves with a figurative art capable of saying things which were important to our people...non-figurative art did not serve our purpose..."³¹ Siqueiros reasoned that the Mexican audience for murals would be impatient with or unable to relate to nonrepresentational imagery. Artists needed to produce an art with explicit, readily decipherable messages.

Contextualization of our interpretation of "The Artists' Statement"—before, during, and after 1971—requires that we look repeatedly in two directions, north and south of what has been for so long a contested border between México and the U.S., the latter referred to in a reclamatory tone as the "greater Mexican North."³² A project of subversive reclamation would seem to be the fitting ideological coda or legacy indicated for "The Artists' Statement."

Were David Alfaro Siqueiros alive today, he would vehemently repudiate the legislation introduced and voted on during 2005 that called for erecting seven hundred miles of fence along the U.S.-México border to prevent impoverished Mexican immigrants from crossing over and ultimately finding employment in the U.S.³³ Both his mural *América tropical*, and the woodcuts from *El Machete*, alone, speak volumes regarding the ongoing exploitation of the Mexican immigrant-worker. Should such a barrier be erected—no matter how strident the opposition—I envision the emergence of another plausible manifesto inspired by "The Artists' Statement." This one will be identified at some future point in time, urging muralists and artists working in other media on both sides of the border to take to the barricades and appropriate the border wall's surfaces. There, they would create figurative commentary and uninterrupted *trompe l'œil* vistas, illustrating distant horizons devoid of physical barriers! Accordingly, the progressive and sonorous voice of public art would "call" for no more "Berlin Walls," and muralists would "respond" in kind, their new manifesto in hand!

One appropriation of the kind I envisage has already been realized. Chicano artist Alfred Quiroz, a professor of painting

and drawing at the University of Arizona, fashioned a giant *milagro*, a traditional amulet or talisman promoting good health, and bolted it to the border fence in Agua Prieta, Mexico, near a major port of entry for immigrants [fig. 4].³⁴ Recalling a stylized human forehead with prominent circular orbs for eyes, the *milagro* is titled *He saw you*. Quiroz's play on the human gaze seems to subvert prevailing power structures. Rather than the menacing and vigilant gaze of the border patrol officer or the zealously xenophobic "Minuteman," the *milagro* suggests that the immigrant is the one empowered to look back. Yet this gaze is intent on healing, not on confrontation.



Fig. 4. Alfred Quiroz, sculptural *milagro* titled *He saw you*, 2007. US-Mexico border fence, Agua Prieta, Mexico.

NOTES

- * William Walker with John Weber, Eugene Eda, and Mark Rogovin, "The Artists' Statement" (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1971). Published to accompany the *Murals for the People* exhibit, February–March 1971. Excerpted in fragments: "Murals as People's Art," *Liberation* 16, no. 4 (September 1971): 42–46; "The Chicago Muralists," *American Dialog* 7, no. 2 (1972): 23–25; opening epigraph, Eva Cockcroft, et al. *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, xiv; anthologized under John Weber's name and in his 1971 essay, "Murals as People's Art," in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 269–73.
- ¹ Eva Cockcroft, John Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*. Foreword by Jean Charlot (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1977), Foreword, xv.
- ² I adopt the designation of ethnicity for whites to underscore the fact that people of a white complexion are a diverse group made up of different nationalities, each with its own distinctive cultural makeup.
- ³ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Introduction by Thomas McEvilly (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986 [1976]). Within the first six pages of his initial section, "Notes on the Gallery Space," O'Doherty discusses murals in relation to easel paintings, foregrounding spatial considerations: "...murals project ambiguous and wandering vectors with which the spectator attempts to align himself. The easel picture on the wall quickly indicates to him exactly where he stands." (p. 18) Late in his book, within its third and concluding chapter, "Context as Content," the author advances an elegantly crafted credo that, when juxtaposed with the ideological thrust of "The Artists' Statement," reaffirms the essential contrast between private and public space, but not without introducing some important caveats and inherent paradoxes: "The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access. It is a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct line to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location, a reflex to the bald curtain wall, a magic chamber, a concentration of mind, maybe a mistake. It preserved the possibility of art but made it difficult. It is mainly a formalist invention, in that the tonic of weightlessness of abstract painting and sculpture left it with a low gravity. Its walls are penetrable only by the most vestigial illusionism. Was the white cube nurtured by an internal logic similar to that of its art? Was its obsession with enclosure an organic response, encysting art that would not otherwise survive? Was it an economic construct formed by capitalist models of scarcity and demand?..." (p. 80) See William Walker with John Weber, Eugene Eda, and Mark Rogovin, "The Artists' Statement." Published as a freestanding document during the run of the *Murals for the People* exhibit, February–March 1971.
- ⁴ That these deliberative sessions occurred at the South Side Community Art Center is of historical importance in and of itself. The Center, formally dedicated by then-First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, in 1941, evolved in the context of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration. The Center provided a general minority audience with art and culture, while simultaneously affording minority artists and cultural workers employment opportunities. [See *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Edited by James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 48.] The Center was also a crucible for the dissemination of ideas and a place sensitive to international artistic currents. African American painter and printmaker Charles White, an alumnus of the Center, was invited by Siqueiros to the Taller de Gráfica Popular. Accompanied by his then-wife, the artist Elizabeth Catlett, White was made an honorary member of the workshop. [See Victor A. Sorell, "Orozco and American Muralism: Re/viewing an Enduring Artistic Legacy," in José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927–1934. Edited by Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes. (Hanover and New York: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, in association with W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 275.] Art historian Dr. Samella Lewis, William Walker's early mentor, was a student, friend, colleague, and onetime agent of Catlett's. [See "A Visit with Collector Extraordinaire Samella Lewis," by Alitash Kebede, and "Samella Lewis'

- Catlett Collection at the Hampton University Museum," by Valinda Carroll, in *The International Review of African American Art*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2006), 5 and 59.] It was through Lewis that Walker gained an appreciation of "los tres grandes," in particular, and twentieth-century Mexican muralism, in general. Refer to my "Oral History Interview with Chicago-based African American Muralist William Walker," conducted at Chicago State University between March and September 1995 for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵ Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art*, 284. The exhibit was presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, from February to March of 1971.
- ⁶ James Wishart and Joseph Sander, "Museum of the Streets" [closing page of text], ed. Leslie F. Orear (Chicago: Civil Rights Department of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, 1972).
- ⁷ Mark Rogovin and Marie Burton, *Mural Manual (How to Paint Murals for the Classroom, Community Center and Street Corner)*, eds. Holly Highfill and Tim Drescher. Introduction by Pete Seeger (Chicago: Public Art Workshop, 1974 [1973]), preface.
- ⁸ Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art*, 1.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–5, 7–8, and plate 1.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9. This mural's title reflects its abstract content while its nonfigurative imagery calls to mind Pre-Columbian iconography. The mural's original outdoor setting was landscaped, including a picket fence, to mirror elements depicted in the mural's composition.
- ¹² Telephone conversation with the artist, April 27, 2007.
- ¹³ Telephone conversation with the artist, May 1, 2007.
- ¹⁴ Telephone conversations with the cited artists between April 27 and May 6, 2007.
- ¹⁵ "The Artists' Statement," 7–9.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10–11.
- ¹⁷ V.W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969), 96.
- ¹⁸ "Art for art's sake," the vain pursuit of many modernist artists, is what Eda rejects. Their mere expression for personal satisfaction is an end in itself, dictated by hedonistic and narcissistic instincts. "System Art" so understood is wholly devoid of any sense of redeeming ideological purpose.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5–6.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 15–16.
- ²² Carlos Mérida, quoted in Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967 [1962]), 70–71.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 73. Fragment quoted from Siqueiros's manifesto titled "Three Appeals for the Current Guidance of the New Generation of American Painters and Sculptors" [originally published in Spanish as "Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana," *Vida Americana*, Barcelona, May 1921]. Translated into English in "Documents," *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, eds. Héctor Olea and Mari Carmen Ramírez (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 458–59. **Ed. Note:** For a discussion of this same manifesto's importance in the consolidation of the Mexican avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, see Francisco Reyes Palma's essay "Entre la acción directa y la vanguardia: el estridentismo," published in this same volume.
- ²⁴ Fonserrada, quoted in *ibid.*, 74. [originally published in *Revista de Revistas* (Mexico City, October 28, 1921)].
- ²⁵ David A. Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution*. English translation by Sylvia Calles (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 24–25. Excerpts from the manifesto. This text took a clearer approach to a *collective expression of monumental art* in another manifesto published in the official organ of the Mexican Communist Party by their union: "Manifesto of the Technical Workers,

Painters and Sculptors Union of Mexico," *El Machete* (Mexico City) 2, no. 7 (June 15–30, 1924). Translated into English in "Documents," *Inverted Utopias*, 461.

- ²⁶ Charlot (1967), 245. *El Machete's* slogan—*El Machete sirve para cortar la caña, para abrir las veredas en los bosques umbríos, decapitar culebras, tronchar toda cizaña, y humillar la soberbia de los ricos impíos* [The Machete is used to reap cane, to clear a path through an underbrush, to kill snakes, end strife, and humble the pride of the impious rich]—resonates through incisive imagery.
- ²⁷ Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 94.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.* In this case, Goldman's source is Siqueiros's 1960 book *La historia de una insidia*.
- ²⁹ "Mural Art and the Midwestern Myth," in Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973), 64.
- ³⁰ Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution*, 8. Excerpt from a message, "Some Questions about Mural Art in Mexico," sent by the painter from the Lecumberri Prison in Mexico City to the delegates of the 14th General Assembly of the International Association of Arts Critics (AICA), held in the capital of México, July 1962.
- ³¹ Siqueiros, "Lectures to Artists," *New University Thought* (Winter 1962). Quoted in Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art*, 251.
- ³² This phrase, referring to "the provinces occupied in 1848," a consequence of Mexico's defeat during the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, is utilized by the distinguished UCLA-based Chicano historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones in his important and influential essay "On Culture." First published in *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* (Spring 1977), the essay was reprinted in booklet form by the UCLA-Chicano Studies Research Center (Popular Series No. 1/UCLA-Chicano Studies Research Publications, 1981).
- ³³ Refer to the *Washington Times* (December 16, 2005) and FoxNews.com, Associated Press coverage, "Democrats Slow to Approve Funding for Border Fence" (Wednesday, January 17, 2007).
- ³⁴ "Our Walls, Ourselves," by Charles Bowden, with photographs by Diane Cook and Len Jenshel. In *National Geographic* vol. 211, no. 5 (May 2007): 134–35.