

Juan Coronel Rivera is the grandson of Diego Rivera and the son of influential Mexican painter Raphael Coronel. He is an important scholar on the work of his grandfather and an influential collector and curator. He is currently working with Taschen to release a commemorative edition of the entire body of Rivera's work for the 50th Anniversary of Rivera's death. I visited him in his home in San Angel Mexico City on January 17th.

Juan Coronel Responds

My complete name is Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, and I am Diego Rivera's grandson.

The mural in a sense is actually divided in two pieces. It is the communist world that was developed in peace, trying to make some laws for protection of the workers and the other side we have the capitalism with the wars, with invasions and the science working for the development of machine guns, and armament in general. If you saw the mural just like that, well yes it's only a political statement of communism and capitalism in the 30s, but this was not the idea. The statement was to focus on man in the center as the developer of his own history. We are the ones who can work with us as persons in a world to make a better achievement of whatever the world can go. And the point of view of Rivera is that the idea of the war was not a correct idea to develop the consciousness of mankind.

The understanding of Diego through arts was through French culture. One of the very interesting things around him is that he never speaks English, he always speaks French. So this is incredible in the 20th century where everybody speaks English. So when Diego came to Mexico, of course, being a Mexican he had a huge knowledge of Mexican culture. His approach to all the local arts was not as a Mexican. It was as a French artist. He took the essence of Mexican art, through the ideas, the same ideas and the same philosophical position as the French people took the ideas from the African art. That is a completely different point of view of what was going on in Mexico. When he states that the most essential ideas of art are in the most primitive or essential ideas of art, here in Mexico, the Pre-Colombian art he was making a statement exactly like a European would. He was trying to get the real essence of art, to put it through a modern viewpoint. The most important thing is that Diego really developed this part of art, he really put

modern art and Indian art, he made a mixture and he developed a new complete style that influenced during 20s, 30s, 40s the complete aesthetic of the whole world, the United States, France, and of course all Latin America started doing some of the works, not obviously all the art, but a part of the art was very influenced by Diego's aesthetics. In the moment, in the 30s, when he made his one man show in the museum of modern art in New York Diego, Picasso and Matisse were considered the three leading artists at that point. Why, because there were the three points of view of what art was in the moment, Political, the innovation through Picasso, and the decoration through Matisse. So when Diego made his first statement around the local Indians. The first statement he did was taking the essence of this art and bringing through modernity. And that's the most important part of Diego through modern art that he developed muralism that was the first movement that the whole continent gave to the modern art movement. That is something that, I think, we have to say more, here in Mexico. The first movement developed in America, in the whole continent was muralism, and it was the first movement that really impacted all of modern art.

The first thing that we have seen in this mural is that the mural of the Rockefeller Center is not a mural related to Mexico. This is a mural related to the United States.

Since Marx Capitalism Marx established that the first country that can go through the real communism was the United States, because it was the only country that was really developed, really developed, developed in science, developed in economic structure, developed in architecture. They have huge and strong unions in the 30s and the next step that the Americans can do was to go to this equality of society, because Communism is not to take everything from everybody and status-ize everything. It's an idealistic position but the idea was to establish like a standard of a way of life for everybody. So what Diego's establishing in this mural is precisely that idea, that the United States was the most important point of the world that can happen the real communism, as communism was understood. So if I see the mural, for example, if you really analyze the mural you find that, for example, there is not any Mexican in the mural. Most of the workers are European refugees. If you see the faces of all these persons that are there most them are Polish, you can see German's, there is all these people that were establishing themselves in the United States, and during what they call now, the

melting pot. And its what Diego established there, it is the science, the universe, and the myth of man.

Here we have to go through Diego's ideas of development. They are very particular ideas. The first thing we have to know is that Diego was a mason. Here in Mexico, he found a lodge that still exists, which is called, "Logia Xetacuatl". And actually we have some photos of Diego inside the lodge dressed doing these Masonic rituals so we don't have any doubt about that and he also painted some of the works for the Lodge. This is very important, especially in this mural, because his idea of how the world is divided and developed comes from two points of view that, we the ink from our history can be absolutely opposite, that is communism and masonry. But through Diego's eyes he thinks that they were actually the same thing, because masonry and communism were trying to put man in the next step of development, of spiritual development, and of evolution in the sense of intellectual evolution. So what he does in this mural is to get together these two ideas through this person that is in the center of the mural, that is this white guy, controlling the universe, through science and knowledge and masonry and communism is based on knowledge and here we have to establish the concept of knowledge, the knowledge of the philosophical essence of knowledge. Not only of knowing facts, but of knowing the essence of the world, the structure of the universe. That's what he was trying to explain in this mural and the idea is that the development of man is not in creating a structure to exploit man, but to educate man. The essence of the growth of the humanity was based on the science and the sciences show in the schools and through labor. Labor is a strong essence of man. So that's the complete concept of this painting. Its man trying to focus on their next step of evolution.

I think that Diego with this model was trying to make the same statement that Michel Angelo tried to do with his David. He got this male to amplify the society of that moment, because it was, a very, virile guy, strong, healthy, a good male representative of the whole humanity, in his better age. And Diego has the same point of view as Michel Angelo, with the David. It's not this biblical scene that Michel Angelo was trying to represent. It was this scene of humankind during the renaissance.

In America, in the continent, the social movement its completely different than the 30s. The United States in the 30s was going through a Europeanization. All the immigrants

were going to the United States were Polish or German or Swedish, Italians. Right now they're Latin's, so if Diego has to develop this mural again, he will, I think, he should not put an Anglo Saxon person, as the leading control of the machine, he should put something from Latin America, because right now the complete social structure is changing and you can notice this everywhere. It's not something that's good or bad, or it's not a fact that the government can control, because mestizaje is something that happens. Its like, for example, here in the 16th Century, we said that we started our mestizaje, and we developed the structure of the society that we are in right now, this combination between the Indians and the Spanish. Through the years and through the story and the development of the story of what Mexico is, now we know that we have, like 20% of African Mexican blood, all of us, because in Mexico people mixed its not like in the states that they stay separate. And we have also a very high percentage of Arabs, because most of the persons that come through in the 16th Century to Mexico were persons from Arabic conditions that changed from Christianity to come Mexico and start a new life, well t6 New Spain, in those days. And what is happening now is something that it happened by population. The Americans are coming to Mexico and the Mexicans are going to the states and they mixed. So the next step between the nations is to make a new mestizaje and this is something that even though with laws or whatever its not going to be possible to stop. It's going to happen. It's happening. We have like 10 million Americans, because the Americans they are always saying, well we have now 20 million Mexicans, yes but they did not say that we have 10 million Americans in Mexico so its going to happen. So the structure that Diego paints in the mural is no the structure of the United States anymore, also. The structure of the United States its completely different of the structure that he said in this painting.

Diego Rivera is not only my grandfather he is like the grandfather of all the Mexican's and I structure this following this tradition from the Mochicas the Najwa's that there was this big veneration for the old people, because the old people were the ones who had the knowledge and of course Diego has this enormous knowledge of humanity, he was really a genius. And we have to learn a lot around him, of his ideas, of his painting, of the structure of how he paints because he was really a humanist, like in the sense of the Renaissance and I think that whatever the next step of humanity should be, it should be by re- looking at the essence of the Renaissance to see again through the man, not

through economics, or armaments or oil, we have to see again through the soul of humanity otherwise we are going to become extinct and that's a fact, its happening.

In general what I rescue is a composition and the color. The statement was a very risky statement for those days and right now its only history if we base ourselves in the statement. If we see the painting as a complete thing with a very rapid eye I think yes its too crowded but that was his style. If we see it in sections there some portraits that are masterpieces, there are some heads so strongly well painted that its amazing how he can develop how he can develop all the states of being of the humanity. The idea of the mural was very good because as you know the mural was going to be set in a place where the elevators were going to be coming and Diego put the mural floating, that its incredible because he knew well if I am going to do a fresco well I am not going to put it through the walls because it going to crack. I mean nobody thinks that we he does a mural and Diego was really clever and smart for doing this. He put the mural floating, he developed the mural in three sections so you can really have a whole perspective as though you are waling though the mural, because it was not a static piece, because Diego in some of the murals you have the wall, you have the front wall and the only position that you can see that mural, is to see it from the front, a little bit like a three dimensional piece, but this piece that he developed for the Rockefeller Center you can consider it as a painting mixed with sculpture, because you can go through the sides to see the painting. You have a position of the left and of the right and of the center and you can walk through all the painting. And the vision of the people that are involved in the painting follows you so Diego's idea of this concept was very interesting, because he can do a flat painting only painting the front, but he developed the whole concept

When the Rockefeller family hires a communist artist obviously the result of whatever you are going to get is a communist painting. When Diego made his statement through the Rockefeller family he had already the complete mural that for me is one of the best murals he ever did, the one in Detroit. And if you saw that mural, well that mural was a communist statement so whatever you get in New York is going to be something related to this point of view. Going through the Rockefeller archives, now we know that the Rockefeller family, especially Abby, she knew that Lenin was going to be in the mural. And there are some scholars that also state that maybe she was the one who says to Diego that she wants Lenin in the mural. I don't know the political background, because

if you are doing a mural in the most important point, of the most important city, of the most powerful nation, obviously the American government was involved in the complete concept of all the structure of the Rockefeller Center. This was not just a rich man trying to develop a landmark in New York. This was part of the complete idea of the country as the United States developed. So I think that the other story of this mural that we haven't researched is maybe in the archives of the CIA because even though, right now we know, for example, that most of the art figurative, political art, of the 50s were retired through an order of the CIA, we have all the papers right now out. So I think there should be something in that archive that can tell us what at the end frightened them or put the Rockefeller family through the position of destroying the mural. My supposition is that it was part of the publicity of the United States government of strength through pointing that Capitalism was so strong that they can even destroy a work made by a communist and nothing happened.

If you saw the structure of the universe and if you saw the structure of a cell, they are exactly the same. The nuclear structure of a cell, the atom, the neutrons have the same principles as, for example, our solar system, and through these glasses Diego was trying to make this metaphor. We are exactly the same essence. What you have in a macro view and what you have in a micro view through the microscope and the telescope are exactly the same; it's the human structure, and the structure of the universe.