



Jean Charlot and Luz Jiménez

JOHN CHARLOT

Summary

When Jean Charlot discovered Luz Jiménez among the Indian models at the art school of Coyoacán, she became for him the woman he saw in all the women of Mexico. Studying her body enabled him to develop a truly Mexican esthetic. Following her into her daily life allowed him to participate in the age-old activities of the Aztec household, child rearing, pilgrimage, and prayer. The language of those prayers brought him into living contact with the condices he had studied as a youth and revealed the continuity of Mexican Indian culture that was the ultimate and heroic achievement of Luz and her people.

Jean Charlot (1898 1979) and Luz Jiménez (1897 1965) each had an independent career; he as an artist and writer, and she as a model, informant, and author. They also had a long relationship that was important for the history of art and culture. They first met in late 1921 or early 1922, when Charlot was either twenty three or twenty four years old and Luz was a year older.¹ Luz became his model and visual inspiration. She also became his teacher of Náhuatl and Aztec culture, bringing him into her family in their village of Milpa Alta and taking him on their pilgrimage to Chalma. Eventually, Luz asked Charlot to be the godfather of her daughter Concha, which placed him in a *compadre* relation to the family, with important obligations for its spiritual and material welfare.² Charlot and Luz maintained that special connection throughout their lives, and their respective descendants remain close today.

The relationship of Charlot and Luz was, therefore, not the normal, unequal one between artist and model or researcher and informant. Luz was Charlot's model, but also his teacher. At times, Charlot employed her; at others, she and her family received him as a guest. Charlot was always aware of what he owed Luz.³

She's been a great influence on my art. She's been a great influence in introducing me to what I could call my ancestors, that is, the Aztec Indians, because I am part Indian.

Beyond his own debt to Luz, Charlot was well aware of her broad cultural contribution, which is being increasingly recognized.⁴

she was a person of importance in her Indian world, certainly, and this seeped out, I would say, to the other circles in Mexico, and she was considered like quite an important person. I think that when she died there was, by Anita Brenner, a sort of summary of her life in *Mexico This Week* that suggests that she had put over that quality as a person that she had that was outstanding.. She had certain things that were obviously important things, one of them the mastery of the Náhuatl language, so that she was considered by the ethnologists and archeologists as an important, we could say, "living link" with the Indian past. And as a person she was a grand person. That's the only thing one can say.

¹March 5, 1922, is Charlot's first non shorthand diary entry that mentions Luz.

²Karttunen 1994: 197. Later, Fernando Leal, another close friend of the family, would become the godfather of Luz's first grandson, Alfonso (Villanueva Hernández 2004). Charlot did his best, within his own straitened circumstances, to help Luz and her family financially. Their needs were real. Mary and Ruby McKibbin wrote the Charlots on September 9. 1948: "one day when she [Cornelius Ruhtenberg] was with Ricardo Martinez and they were discussing Luz and who should they see at the same moment but Luz selling embroideries to the tourists around the Geneve".

I call Luz Jiménez by her first name in this article because she used it as her professional name. Concha's full name after her marriage was Concepción Hernández de Villanueva.

Charlot's letters to Anita Brenner are in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. I am grateful for access to those letters. Undated letters are cited by incipit. All other unpublished materials are in the Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii; including copies of the Charlot Jiménez correspondence, being edited by Jesús Hernández Villanueva, Luz's grandson and Concha's son. Charlot 1970- 1978 will be cited as "interview" and date. Charlot 1970-1979 will be cited as "Tabletalk" and date. Charlot n.d. will be cited as "checklist" with number. I have not corrected Charlot's mistakes in Spanish.

I am grateful for the comments, criticisms, and information of Frances Karttunen and Susanah Glusker; daughter and biographer of Anita Brenner. Jesús Hernández Villanueva provided

me with valuable family and village information and revealed his latest research discoveries in his email to me of December 19, 2004. I am grateful for his permission to use them and await their publication in the article he is preparing. Tatiana Flores provided helpful criticisms.

³Charlot 1972. *Tabletalk*, July 8 9, 1971. Unusual relationships of many kinds between collaborators of different cultures can be found in Karttunen 1994.

⁴Interview August 7, 1971. Karttunen 1994: 192-214. *Luz Jiménez, símbolo de un pueblo milenario*, 2000.

⁵A. de León Portilla 1988: 178 f, 200, 237. Karttunen, 2000.

⁶Horcasitas 1968. Horcasitas and Ford 1979.

⁷A. H. de León Portilla 1988: 213. See also M. de León Portilla, 2000.

⁸Carta a Alberto Beltrán, 17 de abril, 1969. *Tabletalk*, December 6, 1978: Charlot studied with Barlow while Luz was one of the informants.

⁹"Your last letters are something sad". Poem: "Received a good letter"; "Me hizo mucho la noticia muerte Amado"; "Muy importante: Mandame texto azteca del poema Luz, el del comal".

¹⁰Brenner, 1952. Later Charlot and Brenner collaborated on Brenner 1966.

¹¹Brenner, 1970. Mentions of Luz's *cuentos* project in Charlot's letters: e.g., "I did not write you for a little while"; "Just a word about the size"; "Como que nunca escribes"; March 29, 1925; April 8, 1925; May 8, 1925. In Brenner 1970, illustration 188 on page 359, is a drawing by Charlot described on page 351 as "to illustrate native tale."

¹²Charlot to Brenner "I am very desirous myself." Charlot told me he thought Luz should have been listed as an author of the book.

Luz most obviously transcended the role of artist's model in her extensive work in language and culture:

She spoke beautiful Aztec. In fact, later on, when she was older, she was what is called an informant on Aztec languages in the School of Ethnology.

Luz worked as an informant, among others, for Benjamin Lee Whorf, Robert Barlow, and Fernando Horcasitas.⁵ Luz was important also as a transmitter of traditional Náhuatl stories and as a writer of original narratives in that language.⁶ Ascensión H. de León Portilla writes: "Posiblemente ha sido la persona que más ha contribuido con su palabra al rescate de relatos en náhuatl". She has possibly been the person who has contributed most with her language to the rescue of tales in Náhuatl.⁷ Charlot followed Luz's linguistic work throughout her life and after her death, remembering his studies with her and Barlow in the 1940s:⁸

Horcasitas me mandó el libro nahualteco, los recuerdos de Luz en Milpa Alta; y me dio gusto ver tus bellos dibujos, recordándome nuestros tiempos en Etnografía, tratando de aprender —en mi caso en vano— el náhuatl.

Horcasitas sent me the Náhuatl book, the memoirs of Luz in Milpa Alta; and I was pleased to see your beautiful drawings, remembering our time in the School of Ethnography, trying to learn Náhuatl in my case, in vain.

Charlot appreciated also her compositions "The last tales written by Luz are very beautiful" and asked Brenner to send him the Náhuatl text of her poem.⁹

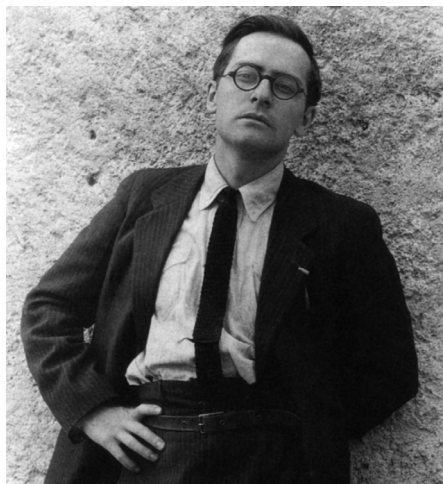
Charlot worked with Luz and Anita Brenner on a publication of her tales in English, *The Boy Who Could Do Anything*.¹⁰ Discussions "on Luz book" fill Charlot's letters to Brenner beside those on her concurrent project *Idols Behind Altars*.¹¹ Charlot considered Luz a true collaborator:¹²

I am very desirous myself to publish the story book, specially because Luz writes me that she badly needs the money. I about arranged with Sheed and Ward, 63 5 th Ave for it. They have the drawings. You could go or write there to Miss. M. Hunt who knows about it. My only change from the original plan would be to include a few stories that you had excluded, because I am very fond of my drawings for them (the choice of drawings that Sheed has is my choice for the stories).

Also to split whatever money would be coming in 3 parts, so as to send some to Luz.

I would like also to have a hand in designing the book, having done pretty well with the Amelia del Rio book.

Ultimately, beyond her accomplishments, Luz impressed Charlot as a human being, "a grand person". I myself knew Luz when my father was in Mexico from 1945 to 1947, working on his book *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920-1925* (1963). Luz and sometimes Concha lived with us, helping with the family,



Jean Charlot, 1926,
plata sobre gelatina,
Colección Familia Charlot.
Foto: Edward Weston.

especially with us children. Luz had unusually large eyes, bright and active. Her face was expressive and animated, and in the kitchen with her friends, she was constantly, talking and laughing. Her body was stocky, and strong, whisking one or more of us children up in her arms to move us around. She radiated an impressive sense of physical and personal strength.

In their correspondence, Luz is always respectful and formal; Charlot is more familiar; but not patronizing. In his letter to her of June 18, 1962, she is treated as a colleague of the artists:

Que bueno que tú estés dando pláticas en la televisión. Es cierto que ya muchos están interesados en estos días de nuestra juventud, y en lo que decían y hacían Diego y Clemente y nosotros entonces. Con tantos años pasados, ya parece que lo que hacíamos entonces era bueno. Aunque la gente no se daba cuenta.

How good that you are giving talks on television. Certainly many are interested now in those days of our youth and in what Diego and Clemente and we others were saying and doing then. Now that so many years have passed, it appears that what we were doing then was good. Although people didn't realize it.

Charlot greatly admired Luz's strength of character, which he found in her whole family. When Concha was troubled by a relative's giving birth to an illegitimate child, Charlot recalled Luz's problems with Concha's own illegitimacy:

Es triste pero no tan grande tragedia esta situación. Tu mamá, la cual era grande y fuerte persona, encontró tal situación y cuando fuimos a llevarte al bautismo, nada mas dos personas fueron, tú mamá y yo y el sacerdote tuvo que poner 'nombre desconocido' adonde debía de escribir el nombre de tu papá. Ya ves que tu mamá llegó a ser persona sumamente respetada y apreciada por todos los que la conocieron y con grande dificultad manejo educarte siendo tu persona buena y fuerte y con toda tu familia educada y disfrutando empleos interesantes.

He conocido cinco generaciones de tu familia y se que en cada generación hay problemas que resolver.

This situation is sad but not such a great tragedy. Your mama, who was a great and strong person, met such a situation, and when we went to take you to your baptism, no more than two people were there, your mama and I, and the priest had to put "name unknown" where the name of your papa should have been written.

Now you see that your mother succeeded in becoming a person most highly respected and appreciated by all those who knew her and with great difficulty managed to educate you, you being a good and strong person and with all your family educated and enjoying interesting employment.

I have known five generations of your family and know that in each generation there are problems to solve.¹³

Charlot always spoke of Luz as an equal friend with a special family relationship. She was someone with whom he could talk.¹⁴

¹³February 20, 1972. Charlot's own father Henri was illegitimate. Contrary to Charlot's letter; Concha's baptismal certificate does contain the father's name, Manuel Hernández Chaparro. According to her son, Concha and her family knew the identity of her father but kept it as a family secret. That Anita Brenner, the godmother, knew who the father was, is proven by a letter to her from Luz of August 30, 1928, in which he is named (Villanueva Hernández 2004). Charlot also must have known the name of the father; but kept the family secret. When I questioned him, he said that most people thought it was Fernando Leal. To my knowledge, he never said definitely that Leal was the father. That Charlot would evade my question by very uncharacteristically repeating gossip reveals the lengths to which he would go to keep the family confidence, not betraying it even to my mother. Charlot's inaccuracy in his letter of February 20, 1972, could be due to faulty memory or to his uncertainty about whether Concha knew the secret.

For some reason, when I was very young and probably wondering about the unusual close-

Estoy en mis días de tristeza etc...Yesterday the whole afternoon hemos hablado de ti with Luz. She seems the only one (entre los que yo conozco) to really *like* you and the only one, por consecuencia, con quien puedo hablar de ti.

I am in my days of sadness, etc...Yesterday the whole afternoon I spoke about you with Luz. She seems the only one (among those I know) to really *like* you and the only one, in consequence, with whom I can speak about you.

Even when Luz was working in our family in the 1940s, Charlot did not think of her as an employee. When I asked him how she happened to come and live with us, he told me that when she heard we were arriving in Mexico, she "came to help". That is, he emphasized her giving aid as a friend. Indeed, Charlot's memories of Luz from that time were familiar. In a letter to Alfonso Villanueva (February 9, 1965), he described how his son Martin remembered Luz:

Cuando de chiquito en México luz [sic] siempre le ponía a noche adentro de su rebozo y le ponía a dormir cantando. Es un recuerdo de los primeros que tiene de su vida.

When he was a little boy in Mexico, Luz was always putting him at night inside her rebozo and putting him to sleep by singing. It's one of the first memories he has of his life.¹⁵

Later, Luz lulled her grandchildren to sleep with French songs she had learned in our family (Villanueva Hernández 2000: 33). Finally, Charlot identified with Luz in death, writing Concha: "La muerte de tu mamá me ayuda a darme cuenta de que ya soy bastante cerca del fin de mi vida". The death of your mother helps me realize that I am now close enough to the end of my life.¹⁵

As an artist, Charlot could think of Luz and portray her "as a sort of earth mother" (Morse 1976:44). She could be "the woman of deep, compel-

ling mystery" (Karttunen 1994: 202) and the "arquetipo de la mujer indígena mexicana". Archetype of the native Mexican woman (Villanueva Hernández 2000: 27). But first and foremost, Luz was for Charlot "a grand person", which is the key to their relationship and to the art she inspired. That is, for Charlot, relationships had to be truly human and art had to be based on reality. By deepening his relationship with Luz, Charlot was achieving a true understanding, of the Mexican way of being human. By portraying her in her man facets, he was expressing that understanding.

The special inspiration an artist can receive from a model or colleague has been studied, for instance, in Picasso and George Balanchine; periods of their work can be defined by the person they were working with. Diego Rivera's portraits clearly reveal which subjects excited his brush. Charlot worked with several models at the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre at Coyoacán, but recognized Luz immediately as special. Brenner writes that Charlot "discovered an Indian model who largely because of his paintings became a 'classic' native female in modern Mexican painting" (1970 [1929]: 304). Charlot remembered that "she had been already the model, a special model we could say, of Fernando Leal, and she certainly was my favorite model".¹⁶

There is a whole image there that she projected. Now many of the other girls *could* put their village clothes on and pose with a pot on their shoulders, but they didn't do it, so to speak, to the manner born. And Luz had one thing that was important: she could do it both naturally, as the Indian girl that she was, and know enough so that she could imagine from the outside, so to speak, what the painters or the writers saw in her; and she helped both see things because of that sort of double outlook she could have on herself and her tradition. I think that not only in art but, as I said, in ethnology, she has been a very important link between past Mexico and present Mexico.

Charlot's description of Luz's active role in modeling parallels that of her work as a linguistic informant; Karttunen writes (2000: 152): "The process required the same sort of intuitive interaction between two people that modeling and painting requires". Both as a model and an informant, Luz had to be an insider an authentic member of her culture and an outsider capable of emerging from her own cultural environment and approaching a person of a different culture. She was a model who could move towards an artist's vision could collaborate in his creation just as a good dancer can move towards the style of a choreographer and suggest its further developments.

This "double outlook" of Luz emerges from her very personality: she was reared traditionally in Milpa Alta but most unusually from her childhood, made an intense effort to receive a Western education in order to practice the non traditional profession of school teacher. Her respect for and appreciation of her mainstream and Western colleagues came from her longing to be connected to their world. Her understanding of their needs came partly from her limited formal Western education which included art but probably more from her continual learning experience of working with them.¹⁷ Since her colleagues were some of the great minds of the twentieth

ness of our two families I asked my mother if Concha could have been my father's child. My mother denied strongly that there had ever been any romantic feelings between Jean and Luz. She also emphasized that if Concha had been his child, my father would have recognized her and fulfilled all his duties towards her. The devout Catholicism of Charlot and Luz certainly was a factor in their friendship. Consequently, no sexuality intruded on their relationship; Charlot was always perfectly respectful. This is an important reason, I believe, for Luz's consenting to pose nude for Charlot.

When later objections were raised to the baptism of the sickly child discussed in the letter of February 20, 1972, Charlot wrote Concha very practically (n.d.):

En cuanto a la cuestión del bautizo, acuérdate de que, en caso de enfermedad grave, puedes tú misma bautizar, poniendo el agua sobre la cabeza de la enfermita y diciendo, "Te bautizo en nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo." Es tan válido ese bautizo como [sic] el hecho por un Padre. Siempre cuando se alivia la niña, puede pedir bautizo en la Iglesia.

"As to the question of baptism, remember that in case of grave illness, you can baptize the child yourself, putting the water on the head of the little sick one and saying, 'I baptize you in the name of the Father; the Son, and the Holy Spirit'. This baptism is as valid as the one done by the

century, this was a rich compensation for the schooling she had missed. On the other hand, Luz did not reject her traditional culture in order to join the modern world; rather she worked as an expert to enable foreigners to understand and appreciate it.

I believe that one reason Charlot and Luz understood each other so well was that they were both insider outsiders. A member of a Franco Aztec Mexican family, Charlot had been reared in France surrounded by rich collections of his family's diverse cultures. In France, he was never wholly French; in Mexico, he was never wholly Mexican. Luz and Charlot could meet as few people can beyond their cultural borders.

To understand how Charlot learned from Luz as a model, I divide the subject very generally into three approaches. An artist can do a real portrait of a model, that is, emphasizing the individual person. The model can also be treated as a representative or embodiment of a particular culture. Finally, the model can be used for an exercise in artistic style perhaps an innovation or an exploration of a particular artistic element that the model brings to the artist's mind. All three approaches were important in Charlot's work and are ultimately inseparable; that is, they are all present in varying degrees in each individual work of art. Charlot was never unaware of the real person he was portraying, of that person's cultural background, or of the fact that he himself was creating a work of art. He could, however, emphasize one or more aspect.

Charlot's methods and interests can be studied in his French period, from his childhood works to his departure for Mexico in 1921. Working from the model was an important part of academic art education, which Charlot experienced with his early tutors and as an adolescent at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. Charlot was also interested early in portraiture, which he considered a particular strength of French art. He contrasted Piero della Francesca to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The Italian was primarily interested in the model for style, turning the head as much as possible into the geometric shape of an egg. The Frenchman never allowed his recognizable style to overpower his interest in the particular characteristics of the model. Toulouse Lautrec "saved the subject", Charlot argued, because he liked the model as a person. As a result, much of Toulouse Lautrec's artistic interest was in searching out his model's individuality. In saying this, I believe, Charlot, as describing his own attitude. Portraits were his way of understanding a person and a situation, both the model's and his own.

Charlot's portraits of his maternal grandfather, Louis Goupil, illustrate the approaches described above. Charlot started drawing careful, realistic portraits of Louis in 1914, the year Charlot's father, Henri, suffered a breakdown and entered into the decline towards his death in 1915. Charlot was seeking, I believe, to connect himself more closely to his family, to seek his family roots. In 1920, Charlot returned home from his service in World War I and the Occupation of the Rhineland. He was trying to find himself again in his home setting and turned once more to Louis as a model. In Charlot's monumental gouache portrait of 1920, Louis is definitely an

Priest. When the little girl is better, you can always request baptism in the Church".

¹⁴Charlot to Brenner "Como que nunca escribes." See also "Received a good letter": "Me mando Tina Conchita muy bonita. Dile a Luz que pienso mucho en ella y no le escribo porque tendría yo demasiado que decirle". Tina [Modotti] sent me [a photograph of] Conchita, very cute. Tell Luz I think a lot about her and don't write because I would have too much to tell her.

¹⁵June 5, 1965. Also Charlot to Alfonso Villanueva, Luz's grandson, February 9, 1965.

¹⁶Interview August 7, 1971. Karttunen 1994: 197, 199. Ana Lilia Roura 1999: 131, states that Charlot gave Luz another name by which she became known, *Luciana*; however, she does not provide a source. Concha told Villanueva Hernández (2004, and personal communication) that Leal provided the name *Luz* and that both *Leal* and *Charlot* gave her the name *Luciana* at the school of *Coyoacán*.

Compare on the following quotation Tuñon Pablos 2000: 74, "Poseedora de esa enorme fuerza interior; fue capaz de proyectar su imagen como prototipo de la mujer indígena, paradigma patriótico de la mujer mexicana..." Possessor of this enormous interior strength, she was capable of projecting her image as a prototype of the native woman, patriotic paradigm of the Mexican woman.

¹⁷Horcasitas, 1968: 37, 87. Karttunen, 1994: 213.

individual despite the strong simplification and stylization of his profile. But Louis is obviously a man of a certain time and culture, bundled up in the in door clothes and cap of an old Frenchman. Louis revealed even his racial background: the hooded eyes and long, square jaw that reminded Charlot of the portraits of the Aztec emperors he had studied in the collection of codices given by his great uncle Eugène Goupil to the Bibliothèque Nationale. When Charlot looked at Louis, he saw his family history in depth, his genealogical connection to their Mexican past. Finally, starting, in 1916, Charlot used such portraits of Louis as the basis for extreme stylistic experimentations.

Similarly, Charlot's *Self Portrait, Cubist Style* (January 21-24, 1919) was done after the Armistice, when he was trying to understand his experiences during the War. In a contemporary poem, he described the lines of suffering that had been engraved in the face he contemplates in the mirror:

et c'est pourquoi sur ma face jeune, imberbe
le souvenir sculpteur de rides habite
et au noir de mes prunelles du sang gerbe.

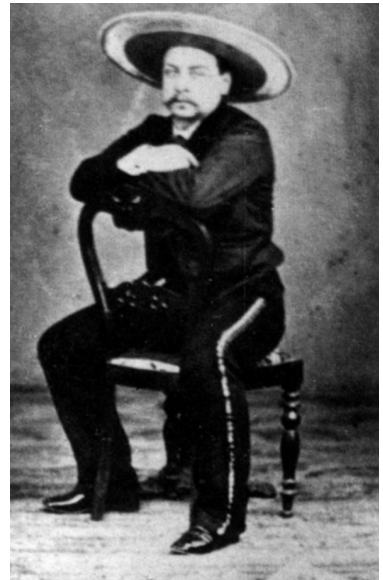
and that is why on my young, beardless face,
memory, sculptor of lines, lives,
and in the black of my pupils, blood gathers.

Charlot used those lines to create a Cubist like analysis of his face, exploring at once style and self.

Reared in a multi cultural household amid art works from Europe, the Americas, and Asia, Charlot was early aware of cultural differences and means of expression. He remembered that his first drawing of a human being was a copy of a print by Hokusai. His childhood sketchbook contains a drawing of a Native American, whom he may have seen in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show when it performed in Paris.

Moreover, in Charlot's youth even more than today, French Culture was not monolithic. Classes and regions maintained different ways of speaking, dressing, and acting. The village of Poissy, where the Charlots had their summer house, had long been famous for the strength of its peasant culture. Charlot experienced that culture intimately in his own home with the local peasant women employed as servants. In fact, this relationship started shortly after his birth when his mother employed as a wet nurse Madame Le Nohan, a peasant from the neighborhood of Poissy. Charlot remembered her vividly (interview October 31, 1970):

she was close to the earth, close to the soil, certainly more than the people who were more at ease in a salon at the time. There was specially something



Louis Cyriaque Goupil,
(1883-1926), Plata sobre
gelatina, 20.5 x 20 cm,
Archivo Museo Estudio
Diego Rivera,
Original Familia Charlot.

terrifically artificial in the women of a certain, well, economic status or class, and they were so heavily dressed and corseted and perfumed and so on that I think I enjoyed the good earth smell of my wet nurse, which I do remember indeed, as a contrast to the more exquisite perfumes that the ladies would drench themselves in.

Charlot remained close to the Le Nohan family, staying with them in July 1916 before going into the army, and doing realistic portraits of Madame and her husband. I believe he wanted an accurate remembrance of them to keep during the turmoil of the War:

Charlot started early to depict peasants as cultural representatives. In 1905, when the Charlots vacationed at the watering place Royat, Charlot drew the local peasants in their traditional clothing: a woman making lace and a bath attendant in folk costume and hat, reading, a newspaper. Even earlier, in one of his first watercolors, Charlot depicted the family's cook in Poissy walking to the market with a large, colorful basket for her purchases (interview October 31, 1970):

the cook *would* go to market in Poissy with a basket, very much the way the Mexican cooks go to market with their baskets. And my first color painting without preparatory drawing that gave me that new sensuous approach to art was of the cook and her basket.

Charlot thus saw a basic connection between his French and Mexican subjects. In large households in France, the children would gravitate to the kitchen, where the women were engaged in their interesting talk and activities. Similarly, in Mexico as a child, I would loiter in the kitchen where Luz, Concha, and their relatives and friends were carrying on an animated social life. Moreover, in France as opposed to England, women participated in all the social activities of the home. France had long recognized women as creative writers and artists. Charlot's own mother was a painter, and he joked that he spread his first colors on the floor of her studio. Charlot consequently felt that "women's work" was important and worthy of being portrayed. When he moved to Mexico, the life of women provided some of his major themes.

Two portraits one early and one late can serve to summarize Charlot's work in France. *Mathilde*, probably of 1911 when Charlot was thirteen years old is a portrait of the family cook at Poissy. She was working in the kitchen—she seems to be sewing—and Charlot used the quiet moment to paint her. This was his first oil, his first essay at exploiting the peculiar strengths of that medium: the glutinous quality of the paint and the effects produced by adding thin layers of different colors. He is fascinated by Mathilde's peasant cap and carefully sculpts it with the paint. But the viewer is struck most by the strong personal character of the subject; the artist's respect and affection for her are evident. All three approaches to the model are synthesized in this juvenile work.

The same synthesis can be found in Charlot's first mature portrait of a non European, his orderly in the Moroccan Division during the Occupation: *Bihain* of February 13, 1920. *Bihain* is an older man in uniform, who has seen many battles, but has not been traumatized by them. He is settled and mature; his face is strong. *Bihain* is smoking a pipe, and the smoke turns into arabesques behind him, suggesting his cultural background. But a strong line between *Bihain*'s profile and the pipe relegates such iconography to the background away from the face. Charlot is acknowledging *Bihain*'s culture, but he is emphasizing him as an individual human being.

Although young, Charlot arrived in Mexico with much experience in portraiture and in working from models. He had also studied Mexican culture and history and was familiar with a wide variety of Mexican art works. He mentioned often the little nineteenth century figurines displayed in a large glass case in their home in Paris (interview September 28, 1970):

Quite a number of those representations are of Indians at their work, and those Indians at their work are the very same people that I found at their work when I went to Mexico and the very same people that I painted at their work with the same gestures that those wax figures were using. The most obvious things were the women working, at their *metates* with their children on their back, wrapped in a *rebozo*. We have that in that collection...

Nonetheless, living in Mexico forced Charlot to reevaluate his ideas and to begin a more intense exploration of the culture, about which he still had much to learn.

Luz was a key person in this process. Charlot first encountered Luz in her role as a cultural representative (interview August 7, 1971):

Well, the open air school, of course, existed, was nearly a survival of the Impressionist times of the Academy of Art, and Ramos Martinez had worked out that idea of having the models pose in what they call natural Surroundings, very different from the Academy, of course, which had everything with a stand and a model posing. So he had the people in Mexican, more or less regular peasant clothes or Sunday clothes, perhaps, with a little more embroidery and so on than everyday things, posing, the men with their *serapes* and *sombreros* and the women in their village clothes, and they posed usually with a sort of semi aesthetic arrangement. The women could perhaps hold a pot on their shoulders and so on. I had rather little relations with most of them. The one I knew best was Luz, Luciana Jiménez.

In that role, she reminded Charlot of the figurines he had seen as a child (interview September 28, 1970):

And some of those women were dressed up actually in the same hand woven and hand dyed costumes of the region of Milpa Alta where Luciana, Luz, who had been my model for all the Indian women that I painted, came from. And Luz



Jean Charlot, *Luz sentada*,
1924, óleo sobre tela,
36 x 28 cm.
Colección Andrés Blaisten.
Foto. José Martín Sulaimán.

herself was dressed up in that beautiful skirt, which is wrapped up in a rather elaborate way with folds, that is a very dark blue, indigo blue, with black lines at the bottom and at the top creamy white, and all the folds are gathered together into a hand woven and embroidered belt, which is a rather stiff belt of white and purple red. Now those colors before I saw them on her; before I saw them on her mother; and so on, when I visited the village, I had seen already in those miniature wax figures. And the way the folds folded, the way the arms in action worked, either giving the breast to the child or working with the stone, hand on the stone metate with the maize flour; I was ready for all that because I had seen it already in those little tableaux.

Villanueva Hernández writes (2004): "Luz se convierte no sólo en una musa sino en algo más, en un resurgimiento del pasado hecho realidad en el presente" "Luz turns herself not only into a muse but into something more: into a resurgence of the past made reality in the present.

Luz with Toy Parrot (1922) was Charlot's first painting at the school at Coyoacán, done in Leal's studio.¹⁸ The young Luz is portrayed in the golden morning light, dressed in her lovely village costume and holding a work of folk art. Charlot has already started his stylistic exploration in depicting Mexican Indians: the head has the hard solidity he admired in Aztec sculpture (interview May 18, 1971):

¹⁸*Luz with Parrot*, oil, 33-1/2" X 24", checklist no. 2.

looking at those people, I didn't think of them as flesh but as hard matter, hard obsidian and so on. That is, a faceting that the French had used without any sense of weight or texture, I would say, in early Cubism, with me became a way of changing the flesh into hard stone. And I think that already is Mexican.

But the accoutrements are folkloristic in accordance with the esthetic of the School. Charlot said of his *Trinidad*, done shortly thereafter; that it revealed (interview May 18, 1971):

a certain uncertainty about the new accessories, paraphernalia. For example, the serape that the man with the cigarette has on is not something that I would choose later on because it's something which is a little bit touristic by the standards acquired when I knew more about *serapes*. Actually, the large hat of the man, the *sombrero*, also is something that later on I used less and less as I looked at Indians in their daily life, in their home and so on. So there is a certain uncertainty or surprise about the subject matter that disappears later on...

Charlot wanted to see the normal life of the Indian (interview September 28, 1970):

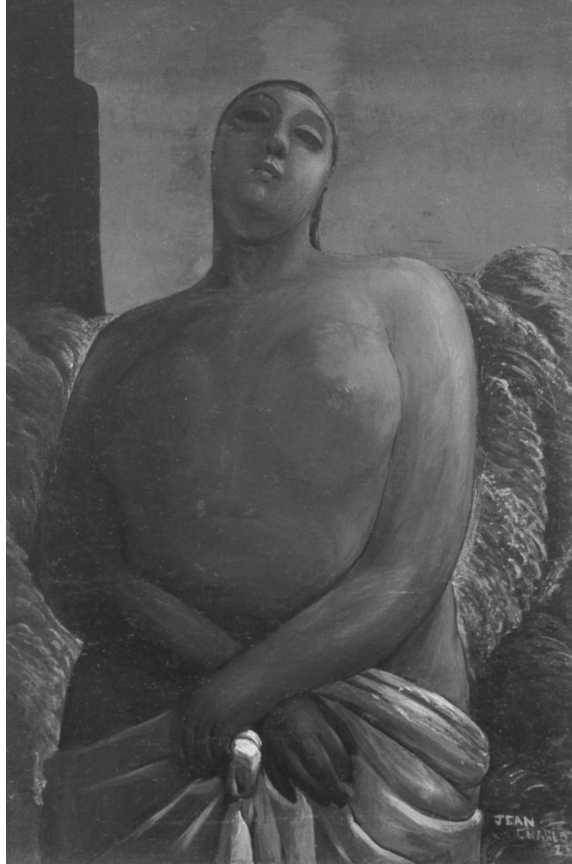
I wouldn't say that I was against picturesqueness, but I would accept only what picturesqueness was part of the make up of the everyday life of the people, and I've never been awfully fond of the unusualness of fiesta days, that is, when all the tourists go in to see the Indians dancing and singing and what not. That's not false, if you want, but it's unusual, like the Kermess of Flanders, which is not typical certainly of the everyday life of the Flemish peasant. So I used things that I considered only deeply engrained. Some of them, for example, are the kitchen chores.

Charlot's second oil portrait, *Luz en buste*, 1924, illustrates the development of his view. Luz is not in her fiesta garb but in her everyday clothes, a blouse and a *rebozo* (similar to those painted by Ramón Alva de la Canal in 1919).¹⁹ Charlot is no longer using the bright colors usually associated with Mexico; he describes the painting in his checklist as "Very dark." The face is stronger and more individual. Charlot would follow that face through the years, noting the changes life made in it. He would do the same with the face of his wife, Zohmah. They are portraits of real people, whom Charlot knew well, as they moved through their distinctive experiences.

Learning to know Luz meant learning about her world. Charlot recognized Luz both as a representative of and authority on the Aztec culture he had long been studying. In France, Charlot had studied the language from the codices; now he could actually converse with Luz in the unusually classical dialect of Milpa Alta (Whorf 1971: 368). Pablo O'Higgins provides a striking picture of the artist student with the model teacher in 1924 (1974):

¹⁹*Luz en buste*, Very Dark, oil, 16" X 13", 1924, checklist number 26. Luz Jiménez, símbolo de un Pueblo milenario 2000: 67.

Jean Charlot, *Desnudo de Chalma*, 1925, óleo sobre tela, 129 x 90.5 cm, Colección Galería Tobeu C. Moss.
Foto: Jose Martín Sulaimán.



when I first knew Jean, Diego said, "You ought to get in touch with Jean Charlot" "Go down to see Jean. Jean is a very fine person and can tell you many things. And he's doing important work". And so I said, "Well, I'm happy to know him. Give me his address". So I rang the front doorbell, and Jean was shaving [Laughs] It was about nine in the morning, I guess. And he said, "Come back at four o'clock". At the same place. "Because I have to go out" or "I have to do something". So I said, "Fine", and when I came back he invited me in. And you know Luciana? Well, Luciana is an Indian woman, a very beautiful woman that Diego painted in Chapingo. And Luciana was sitting on a *petate*, completely nude, very beautiful, and Jean was painting her And they were talking Náhuatl.

In a most important contribution to the new nationalist movement, Luz took Charlot and other artists and writers to Milpa Alta, which as a result became known in artistic and intellectual circles as a place near Mexico City where they could experience the native culture still very much alive. The inhabitants maintained:²⁰

muchas de sus costumbres: la medicina tracional, los baños de temazcal, la vida doméstica, la organización familiar; la confección de prendas con telar de cintura, la vestimenta y principalmente su idioma, el náhuatl...

many of its customs: traditional medicine, sweat baths, domestic life, family organization, the manufacture of clothing with a loom attached to the waist, traditional clothing and especially its language, Náhuatl...

²⁰Villanueva Hernández, 2000: 19; see also 28.

The social organization of the village was probably established in classical times. Certainly, the old religion with its oral traditions was practiced along with folk Christianity, resulting in syncretisms.²¹ Luz herself performed religious ceremonies and practiced herbal medicine and was thus able to instruct the artists in many aspects of village life (Villanueva Hernández 2000: 31). Charlot was particularly impressed by Luz's mother, Juana Manuela González, who told him a great deal about Aztec religion (Tabletalk, March 17, 1977). Luz's mother was one of several older women who provided Charlot with religious instruction, like the Christian mystic Mademoiselle Marchais in Paris and the classical hula dancer Aunt Jennie Wilson in Hawaii. A devout Catholic himself, he felt that religion was basic to a culture and understanding it was essential to entering into that culture's ways of thinking and acting. Villanueva Hernández holds that Luz and Charlot's shared Catholic devotion created "una relación aún más profunda", an even deeper relationship (2004): "Luz era muy católica y Charlot también, esa bondad que manifiestan los fieles católicos la mostraban mutuamente" Luz was very Catholic and Charlot as well; that goodness that the Catholic faithful manifest, they showed to each other.

The artists were very impressed by Milpa Alta. Leal's first mural, *La Fiesta de Nuestro Señor de Chalma* of 1922-1923, is based on his experiences there.²² Fermín Revueltas returned to the village many times, eventually marrying the schoolteacher there, Maria Ignacia Estrada, and teaching art there himself. He organized excursions to the village along with the poet Manuel Maples Arce (Zurián 2002: 23).

Charlot was one of the artists to be invited early to Milpa Alta:²³

Las noticias de tu mamá no tan buenas, pero debe de ser ya muy anciana. Me acuerdo de ella ya de anciana en mi primera visita a Milpa Alta, ¡que era en el año 1921!

The news of your mother's health is not very good, but she must be very ancient by now. I remember her already being old at my first visit to Milpa Alta, which was in 1921!

Charlot spoke often about the impact of this experience (interview May 14, 1971):

The contact or the direct contact with Indians came later on, and much of it really was funneled through the one person of Luciana, or Luz, which started. Of course, just as a pictorial thing, because she was one of the Indian models at the Academy, but later on, going to her village, meeting her mother especially, and her family, it became something more important and more human. (Charlot's interview on August 7, 1971): I did a lot of drawings from her, and then soon after I went to the village that she was born in, that is Milpalta or Milpa Alta, and met her mother, sisters, family, and so on. And for me that was a big experience of getting close to the Indians of the plateau of Mexico, that is, of Aztec stock...

²¹Horcasitas, 1968: 22-29 (old religion and teachings); 75, 81, 123, 125 (folk Christianity); 61, 63, 71, 75, 133 (syncretism). Luz had to refuse some elders' request to offer Concha as a human sacrifice. She explained the situation and asked Charlot and Brenner for advice; they advised against it; Tabletalk March 17, 1977; Brenner, 1970 [1929]: 140; Villanueva Hernández, personal communication. Compare Karttunen, 1994: 212 f Villanueva Hernández 2004 holds this request was a family pretext to rid themselves of an embarrassing child; Luz's asking Charlot and Brenner to help with the child's baptism marked her decision to save and rear Concha.

²²Charlot, 1963: 168. Karttunen, 1994: 196.

²³Charlot to Luz, n.d. Luz's mother, Juana Manuela González, died on August 28, 1958. Charlot's date is most probably early.

So, it's simply, I would say, as far as is possible with the differences of race, perhaps, to an extent, and background, being part of the family. That was a tremendous thing for me. It gave me an inkling, an inside view, of Indian Mexico that I would certainly never have had with even all the studies I could make of archeology, ethnology, or language, which I did at the Museum of Ethnology. Acceptance in Milpa Alta had to be earned (Villanueva Hernández, 2004):

Los extraños son recibidos amablemente pero son estudiados meticulosamente. La gente no abre sus corazones hasta que los extraños han mostrado ser de confianza. A la distancia parece ser que Charlot se ganó el cariño y respeto de la familia de Luz principalmente por ser amistad de Luz, pintor, católico, ayudar económicamente y sobre todo por hablar la lengua náhuatl. Así Charlot tuvo una recepción más que amistosa y convivió con todos los miembros de la familia de Luz incluyendo algunos parientes que vivían en pueblos cercanos a Milpa Alta.

Strangers are received amicably but are studied meticulously. The people do not open their hearts until the strangers have shown themselves worthy of confidence. At this distance, it appears that Charlot won for himself the affection and respect of Luz's family principally because he was in a relationship of friendship with Luz, a painter; Catholic, aided economically, and above all because he spoke the náhuatl language. Thus Charlot was given a reception more than friendly and lived with all the members of Luz's family, including some relatives who lived in villages near Milpa Alta.



Luz con canasta, 1924,
óleo sobre tela, 36 x 28,
Colección Familia Charlot.

Charlot does seem to have been accepted more closely than anyone else into “la calidez del hogar azteca” “the warmth of the Aztec hearth (Villanueva Hernández 2004). Significantly, he did not ignore the differences of race and background, and I suspect that this helped to establish the relationship. In my own experience, Hawaiians do not enjoy having non-Hawaiians claim their Cultural identity, a not uncommon occurrence. The word *ho'ohawai'i* designates pejoratively a non-Hawaiian who mimics Hawaiians or even thinks he is Hawaiian. Hawaiians are more comfortable with people who are at ease with their own cultural identity. The Náhuatl scholar, Frances Karttunen, assures me that most Native Americans feel the same way. Charlot was always very much himself and could appreciate people of other cultures without impinging on them. He could certainly see the difference between his part-Aztec ancestry and the natives of Milpa Alta.

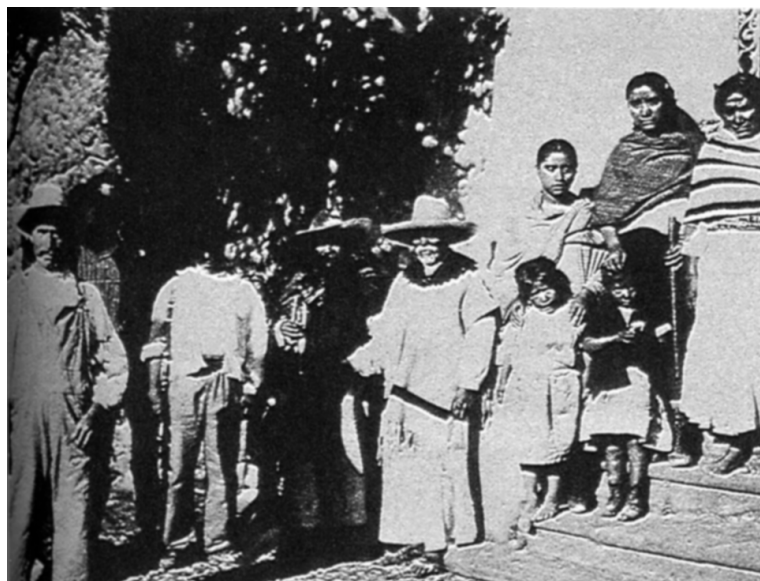
Charlot painted a family portrait, based on a photograph (*Luz Jiménez, Símbolo de un pueblo milenario*, 2000: 103) and portrayed Luz's sister several times. More generally, he also used his observation of family life to develop his major themes, such as *Mexican Kitchen*, *Tortilla Makers*, *Learning to walk*, *Temascal*, *Tying Child to a Chair*, and *Sunday Dress*. Jesús Hernández Villanueva, Luz's grandson, identifies Milpa Alta as the basis for Charlot's theme *Lavanderas, Washer-Women* (2004):

Recuerdo todavía en mi infancia ver la larga fila de mujeres lavando a la orilla del río que cruza al pueblo. Este también es un momento donde se combina el trabajo y la plática entre las mujeres.

I still remember seeing in my childhood the long line of women washing clothes on the banks of the river that runs through the village. This also is a moment that combines work and conversation among the women.

The viewer sees the inner life of the Aztec home, not as a tourist sight or folklore, but as a revelation of basic human relationships as they are expressed beautifully in a particular traditional culture. Charlot saw Aztec practices as translucent with universal values. Seeing the Aztec mother bathe her child in the *temascal*, sweat bath, inspires a sense of kinship in all those who have bathed children in whatever ways have been developed by their own culture. Charlot portrayed as *Work and Rest* the Aztec mother kneeling on the floor and simultaneously grinding corn and rocking, to sleep the child bound to her back. Aztec culture had provided a particularly compact representation of the relation of parent and child: the parent's labor provides the child's peace. Studying the Aztec way of being human helps the viewer understand his own.

In France, Charlot had appreciated the kitchen as a family center; he recognized its special importance in Mexico. As other native cultures, Aztec life had long been threatened by the mainstream culture, economy, and society. In such situations, I would argue, the public male roles are attacked first: warrior, chief, doctor, native priest, and so on. As traditional male roles are diminished or even destroyed, the Culture retreats into the home and especially into the world of women. Not only do they bear and nurture



Autor desconocido,
*Luz y familiares después
de un entierro en la Iglesia
de la Asunción, Milpa Alta,
Distrito Federal, ca. 1929,*
plata sobre gelatina,
Colección Familia Charlot.

Jean Charlot, *Peregrinos de Milpa Alta*, 1932, óleo sobre tela, 127 x 101, Academia de las Artes de Honolulu, Hawai. Donación del Doctor Robert Browne y señora.



the children, they transmit to them their Culture. The life of the women in the home —centered on the kitchen— was the strongest refuge of Aztec culture and the basis of its survival.

In Charlot's depiction of tortilla-making, a child imitates her mother who glances down unobtrusively at her daughter. Charlot had seen an event I myself witnessed in the Náhuatl village of Canoa in 1992. The family receiving our group had maintained its ancestral milpa, corn patch, that produced a particularly delicious and beautifully blue corn for tortilla dough. Five women, two of whom were elderly, were patting the dough into tortillas in the kitchen. Then for the first time, the twelve-year-old daughter of the family started helping with the task. The women beamed and watched the girl without remarking on her work. Then they returned to their own. I asked one of the women later whether they were teaching the girl. She said, no; girls just watched women working and joined in when they felt the impulse. Once girls started, however, they would continue making tortillas for the rest of their lives.

Charlot felt that the people who were maintaining their families and their cultures under great outside pressure were heroic and should be recognized and memorialized. They were fit subjects for monumental treatment on a mural scale. Moreover, the culture they were maintaining was a treasure for the world, with the unique beauty of its ideas, creations, and practices. Such cultures and their members deserve our respect, gratitude, and appreciation. All his life, Charlot opposed the all too common view that members of minority cultures should abandon them and assimilate themselves into the

mainstream. Any solutions to the problems of minorities, any schemes for their betterment, must start from a basic respect for their culture.

Luz's family also took Charlot out of the home on their traditional pilgrimage to Chalma on January 2-8, 1925: "With Luciana, we went for example to Indian pilgrimages which were really pagan business and not white man's business,²⁴ or tourist business. From this experience, Charlot developed such themes as Chalma Bathers, the Procession at Chalma, and the related children's dances. Such works are informed by Charlot's deep appreciation of Indian religion. In fact, Charlot's experience of Indian spirituality transformed his previous views as well as the style of his religious art. He contrasted his woodblock series *Chemin de Croix* (1918-1920) and his French religious poetry to his new views and visual expression (interview November 6, 1970):

There was, for them, there was a spirituality in elongation, and ill that *Way of the Cross*, I am working within that world of thought that, we could say, thin people are more spiritual than fat people. Since then, and I think before that and after that also, I have had other ideas about spirituality, and I went back very quickly to the stocky bodies I had learned of in looking at Mexican antiquities.

Nowadays I am horribly worried by certain ways of thinking that come out in the words in those poems. I always tie spirituality with, for example, whiteness. I speak of the white fingers of our Lord and the white this and the white that, and it reminds me of something, that I found in Bloy, I think, when he was very annoyed at somebody who said that "he was entranced by the whiteness of the Host". And there Must have been in me something that disappeared somewhere on the way in living, because nowadays I really think that black, probably, and certainly brown have more of a tie with spirituality than white.

He felt so strongly about these differences that he tended later in life to depreciate unjustly much of his French work.

If Aztec culture could have such a positive impact on him a cultivated Frenchman it had a contribution to make to world culture. Charlot continued to develop his Mexican subjects including his depictions of Luz until the end of his life for two reasons. First, he was the kind of artist who is able continually to explore and to deepen his themes. Even more important, his Mexican subjects were not just local sights but revealed the fullness of human life (interview September 28, 1970):

from the beginning up to now, the themes have enlarged around the same things: the very few costumes and accessories and the very few motions of the housework, for example, of the women, and that has been sufficient to guide really my whole art. Not so much perhaps as subject matter: as a general statement about maybe not pleasant life but good life as I understand it and summed up in the life of the Indians.

Most important, he felt that his own perception coincided with that of the Indian artists themselves:²⁵

²⁴Charlot 1972. Villanueva Hernández, 2000: 3 I. Karttunen 1994: 196; email to John Charlot July 25, 2000: "JC, Anita Brenner, and Frances Toor went to Milpa Alta on January 2, 1925 to join Luz's family, and they all set out for Chalma the next morning. They slept out one night on the way and reached Chalma the next. The local priest offered them a room, and they stayed until January 8." Morse, 1976: 4. On the pilgrimage, see Horcasitas, 1968: 54-69.

²⁵Interview October 1, 1970. Morris, Charlot, and Morris, 1931: 311 ff.

It certainly is true of the painter that there are many things that get bottled up in him to come out later on. However, in the codices, of course, which I looked at when I was young, there are many of the actual postures, mostly of the women, that I saw in Mexico. Again there, that was a double image. That is, when I was looking at the Mexico of my day and of the actual people doing the house chores, I had at the back of my head the vision of the manuscripts, of the drawings of the ancient Aztec painters, representing, similar movements, similar motifs, some five hundred, six hundred years before. I was very impressed when I was in Yucatán doing the copies of the columns of the Temple of the Warriors —there were perhaps three hundred drawings of bas reliefs there— to find that one of the signs which, of course, wasn't Aztec, it was Mayan but to illustrate the verb action or the verb accomplishment, there was a hand of a woman, just the wrist and the hand of the woman holding the roller, the stone roller, and rolling, the dough on the metate. It's of course not exactly representational, it is just a hieroglyph, like an Egyptian hieroglyph, but it was such a summing up of so many things that I had stored in my mind and exteriorized in my pictures that it was interesting, there to see that in the temple that may have dated of the thirteenth century. The Aztecs in Mexico in some temples and the Mayans in that particular Temple of the Warriors had come more or less to the same conclusions that I had come to when they think of summing up in one gesture the verb *action* in terms essential to Indian life.

Basic to a culture is its way of seeing, which can be studied in its visual expressions. As a French artist, Charlot was always convinced of the importance of style for the type of work to be done, the occasion, and the subject. He and the other members of the Mexican Mural Renaissance felt that they had to develop a new style to depict the Mexico of their time. That is, their innovation was not finding new subject matter; in fact, their subjects can be traced from Pre-Columbian art through Colonial and nineteenth century art until their own day. What Charlot and his colleagues criticized in earlier depictions was their adoption of foreign styles that assimilated Mexican subjects into a European way of seeing. A modern Mexican style had to be created to do justice to Mexico.

In this search, Charlot was a pioneer, both in his study and in his visual art. Several artists mention Charlot's taking them to see Pre-Columbian art at the National Museum, writing on folk art, discovering José Guadalupe Posada, and articulating the ideas of the group. Even more important, he was demonstrating in his own visual art how such study could be used to develop an appropriate style. Luz was an important factor in Charlot's esthetic, stylistic search, as seen above in the quotation about his first Mexican oil portrait *Luz with Toy Parrot* (interview May 19, 1971):

I was already very well aware of the pre-Hispanic forms of art, both in the manuscripts and in the sculptures, *terracottas* and so on: that is, the Indian's own way of looking at himself. And there is a definite sculptural quality, facing in hard material, we could say, in those early portraits. And I think there is in there a lot of obvious dignity that I had learned from the pre-Hispanic collections. I

always come back to my Uncle Eugene Goupil, because I knew those things very well. So it's a mixture of my knowledge of antiquities and, so to speak, the first contacts with live Indians in their habitat. Now, that is a first impression that, so to speak, I couldn't recapture, because when I made friends and was invited in Indian homes and so on, something else emerged which was, perhaps as I suggested, less academic and more simply human. That is, the things that we had in common rather than the things that seemed foreign to myself in the first contact.

Charlot understood himself as a member of the French classical tradition, from Poussin, through David and Ingres, to Cézanne. That tradition was based on Classical art with its geometric approach and use of the nude human body as the basic subject. From the human body, the Greeks developed their esthetics, their sense of style and proportion, which they then extended to fields like architecture. Charlot had worked with nude models in France and at the Academy of San Carlos both on his exploratory trip to Mexico in 1921 and after he settled there later in the same year. Those nudes provide a base-line for understanding his work with Luz. That is, Charlot was following his Classical tradition when he turned to the nude in order to create a Mexican esthetic, and he would make Luz the classic Aztec nude.

The research of Villanueva Hernández (2004) has revealed that “Charlot merece ser el primer artista dentro del muralismo mexicano en pintar una indígena desnuda”, Charlot deserves to be recognized as the first artist in Mexican Muralism to paint an indigenous woman nude. Villanueva Hernández is exploring the evidence to see how far back this judgement can be extended in time. There was certainly no tradition of the fine arts nude study of Mexican Indian women as such. However, later muralists would make the nude Indian woman an important subject. Villanueva Hernández emphasizes how socially difficult Luz would have found posing nude; in fact, she kept that work secret from her family and neighbors. I believe her special relation with Charlot encouraged her to do so for the first time. Later, she would pose nude for other painters and for Edward Weston. A major difference from Europe, however, was that Charlot's Mexican nudes could be placed within a normal life setting. Public nudity had been normal for the Greeks, who, for instance, exercised nude. But academic nude study as practiced in Charlot's time had no social context apart from artmaking itself. Charlot was disturbed by the rarefied character of this setting. However, in Indian culture, there were several occasions in which nudity was normal, and Charlot made two of these major themes of his work. In the temascal, sweat bath, women of all ages would bathe together naked. *The Chalma Bather* was based on Charlot's observation of the pilgrims bathing together in a river to cleanse themselves from their journey before entering the town. In depicting such practices, Charlot could study the Indian body and Indian life together.

Charlot took the body of Luz as diagnostic for the Aztec woman. Edward Weston's photograph, from the back, of Luz nude reveals some of the

²⁶Antonio Rodriguez, 2000: 90; 94, nude photographs of Mexican Indians are unusual, except for the few done for ethnographic purposes. Amy Conger has speculated that Weston's could have been made as an artist's aid. I suggest that Weston became briefly interested in the subject through Charlot's contemporary work.

Jean Charlot, *Por la señal...*
Luz y Concha, 1936,
 Tinta china, carbón y
 sanguina sobre papel,
 65 x 49 cm, Colección
 Zohmah Charlot.



qualities that attracted Charlot. In comparison with the Classical Western body, Luz's head is large. Her strong shoulders, broad back, and slim hips form a block. Her arms are thin, and her legs taper ever more narrowly down to her feet.²⁶ Classical practice for major works prescribed nude studies of the figures who would then be covered with clothing, the shape of which would be determined by the body inside. The Aztec body when robed could be rendered as the cube with rounded edges that Charlot would develop in many media. Charlot discussed with me an important series of nude drawings he made of Luz in 1923:²⁷

²⁷Interview August 7, 1971.

Charlot and Leal seem to have been working on the same lines. Charlot, 1963: 168, published Leal's memoir: "I aimed at giving their racial types a monumentality undiluted by occidental standards"; Karttunen, 1994: 201. Charlot showed Weston "thirty or so" drawings of Luz, Karttunen, 1994: 199; I remember about this number in my father's studio before they were dispersed in individual sales.

Well, those were done early. Most of them were done in '23, I think. But in '22, I was extremely busy with the fresco in the Preparatoria. In '23, I finished the fresco early in the year, or unveiled it early in the year; and then I had a sort of a leisure until '24, when I did a few frescoes in the Ministry of Education. That is when I did quite a number of drawings from life from Luz, kind of mixing, up both the sighting, you could say, of the Indian nude and the things I knew about Aztec Indians.

The analysis which shows to me I've been successful is that it would be hard to find classical hangovers, so to speak, of, shall we say, classical Greek statues in my views of Indian nudes. So I know that it's not entirely a negative thing, and if it doesn't have the elements that you learn in school, let's say, at the Beaux Arts,

it must have other positive elements that, if I may say, were rather hard to root out of the daily life of my models.

For example, perhaps for me the most striking thing in retrospect perhaps are the series of nudes I did which are not tainted, I would say, by the idea of a classical Greek or Roman nude, and as such I think go rather deep into the point of view of the Indian. The whole point of the pictures was to put things in form and color that have not or cannot be put into words.

Again, Charlot felt that his own thinking and artistic exploration had been validated by the discovery that they coincided with those of Indian artists. When Charlot visited the famous Panduro family of folk potters in Tlaquepaque, he was given a statuette of a woman making tortillas, an unusually personal work that was probably a family portrait. He treasured it and depicted it many times:²⁸

Well, I think it was a sort of a security for me that those series of drawings and woodcuts of the nude had been on the right line, because that little statue is, of course, a sort of a praise of the feminine body, but in terms that certainly are untouched by Greek and Roman classical beauty. Between the bulk, for example, of the body and the limbs that are represented not for the muscle formation but for the rhythm of the work, and the relation of the small head on the large body, all those things are for me a sort of a pleasant reminder that what I had found on my own was something that also existed in the head of the Indian artist, of the Indian potter.

For Charlot, the Indian esthetic was the subject of an endless quest:

Well, I haven't achieved it yet. That is, it's sort of a monumental idea. And given that it is not in anatomical terms, that idea of Indian esthetic doesn't remain inside or skin-deep with the form of a body but pervades, or should pervade, everything around. And it is such a sort of nearly encyclopedic affair that I have been working for it, well, pretty much a lifetime, and I still feel that I could work for it another lifetime and not et to the end of it. It's not a question of saying, "Eureka!" It's just a question of following and finding in things say the shape of trees or the ears of a mule or an such thing the same esthetic qualities which I felt are part of the Indian world.

The complexity of this quest is suggested by a story Charlot told of painting *Luz with Basket* of 1924:²⁹

I knew very well the value of cubes, but I also knew that I could not flaunt art in the face of my Indian friends, because it would be wrong, it would be prideful, and it would end by alienating them. So I had to learn, as I said, I had to be born anew.

Of course one of the great influences on me at the time is Luciana, who was my Indian model. I would ask her what she thought about the things I did, and I would correct them very carefully. For example, I remember once I had put a highlight in her hair. She was in her twenties, and her hair was a beautiful black, and those highlights were of course white, and she said, "Why do you put white

²⁸Interview August 7, 1971. Charlot, 1963: 30 f, figure 5. Morse, 1976: 64. The statuette is now in the JCC.

²⁹Charlot, 1972. *Luz Seated with Basket*, oil, 14" X 10-3/4", 1924, checklist no. 40.

Autor desconocido,
Luz con Jean Charlot y sus hijos Ana, Juan, Martín y Pedro, 1946,
 plata sobre gelatina,
 Colección Familia
 Villanueva Hernández.



hair in my head. I don't have white hair.' So I had to learn and try something else by which I could make her head go round without highlights. It wasn't easy. This is a portrait of her in that particular style that I worked hard to do as if I had never known in Paris.

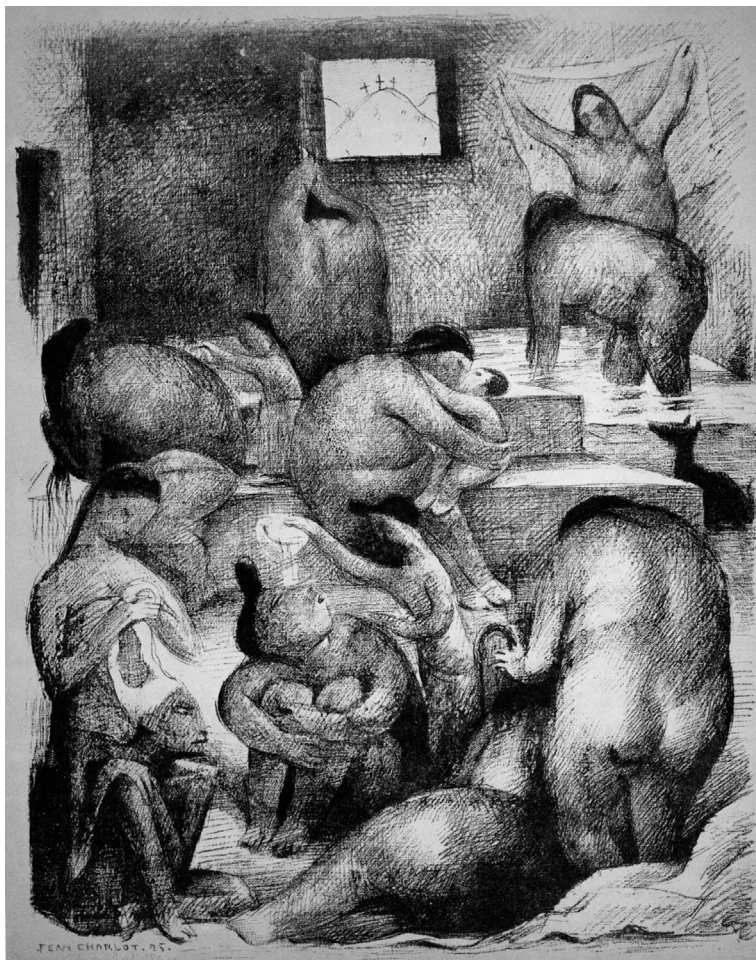
Charlot is consulting Luz as far more than a model. In their special relationship, his work had to please her; to pass her judgment. She is a full human being, participating in the creation of the art work. She helped him recognize those conventional Western devices that were so engrained that he had ceased to be aware of them. Abandoning Western conventions and finding means that would be acceptable to his Aztec collaborator helped him develop a non-European, Mexican style. Their collaboration demanded authenticity and articulation from Luz and humility and sincerity from Charlot. The success of their work together speaks for both of them.

An interesting consequence of Charlot's attitude was that he avoided using extreme distortions of Luz or his other Indian models. Charlot could use his own grandfather for such experiments, because he belonged to a culture that would understand them. Indian subjects would not, and this cultural difference had an impact on the style Charlot developed. He disliked the print *Banana Vendor* in which he felt he had gone too far (Morse, 1976: 40).

After Mexico, Charlot would explore two other cultures, and portraits and models would again prove basic to his work. When in 1930 Charlot met a young American named Grace, he thought: "She was the most un-Indian thing we had ever met. I thought she would be nice for a contrast.³⁰ With her white skin, blue eyes, sharp features, and long, thin neck, she is the opposite of Luz. Charlot has her wear a "pilgrim cap" to provide her cultural, historical context. Similarly in Hawaii and Fiji, he would depict Polynesian and Melanesian bodies in their world.

Luz was, however, the most important single model in Charlot's life. The reason for this was undoubtedly the depth of their relationship. Luz showed Charlot not only what it was like to look Aztec, but to be Aztec. The people of the land were not artifacts or Museum pieces. Reared in

³⁰Morse, 1976: 113. Also two paintings: *Grace (American girl)*, oil, 12" X 8", June 1931, checklist 230; *Grace*, 1931, 26" X 18", checklist 239.



Temascal, 1925, México,
litografía sobre piedra
transferida a papel,
70.4 x 55.3 cm.
Colección Fundación
Jean Charlot.

the traditional way of life, survivor of the Revolution, Luz proved that Aztec courage and strength survived in the modern world. The impact she had on artists and thinkers like Jean Charlot demonstrated how much her culture still had to contribute. As quoted above, Charlot wrote that Luz "llegó a ser persona sumamente respetada y apreciada por todos los que la conocieron", succeeded in becoming a person most highly respected and appreciated by all those who knew her. She did this also for her people. Luz and Charlot shared the same mission.

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