

The Virtual Museum of Labor (topic) Curator: Corrine Towner

Mount **proportional** reproductions or thumbnail sketches of each **entire** image. Use additional pages as necessary.

Catalog Entry # 3 of 4 Date: 2-4-10

Alternative Image #1:

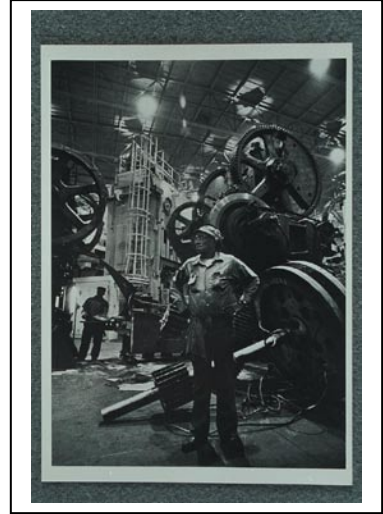
Title: Men at work in various factories

Artist: Earl Dotter

Date: 1982

Medium: photomechanical print

Image Source: <http://www.artstor.org>



Alternative Image #2:

Title: British Guns: no.1: the women behind the guns

Artist: unknown: War Poster, World War II

Date: 1939/1945,

Medium: mainly photography and text

Image Source: <http://www.artstor.org>



Selected Image

Title: "Detroit Industry"

Artist: Diego Rivera

Date: 1932-1933

Medium: Fresco

Size: NA

Style: Mexican Muralist/ Social Realism

Location: Detroit Institute of Arts, south wall

Image Source: Rochfort, Desmond. *Mexican*



Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros. Chronicle Books,

San Francisco, CA, 1993: 129. (see note under research sources)

Comprehensive description of Subject Matter and its placement in the composition

The central panel of this complex work is dominated, on the right middle ground, by a large stamping machine with other machinery, its angles, tubes, car parts and circular forms continuing around it into the background and to the left of the composition. Most of the human figures are in a forward position engaged in the assembly of automobiles in a cooperative effort. There are also management type figures, with papers or clipboards in the lower right of the main panel and the lower center left. In the background of the lower central area there appears to be some observers of the assembly process and in the far right upper corner there are some female workers, the far left shows auto body painters. In the foreground, in front of the assembly scenes are, from left to right, a farming or mining scene, a sawmill, what may be a classroom, two manufacturing scenes and a depiction of workers leaving the plant. In the upper panels, from left to right, is an office scene with secretaries to the left and right and an accountant central, flanked in the upper corners by a scientist on the upper left and a worker on the upper right. There is also a woman in the upper central area. Below this panel is an operating scene. The upper central panel depicts a very white female figure holding crystals (left) and an Asian figure holding earth or sand to the right. In the central region of this panel there are hands and fists rising from a pyramid of shaped boulders, some clenching stones, some empty. Below this panel is a scene of fossils in earth, crystals in both lower corners, and a white wall of brick-laid stones continuing from the left toward the right, about 2/3 of the way across this panel. The far right panel contains a manufacturing scene, stylized, with the workers seeming to blend into each other, the background and their work. Below this panel is a landscape with a city on the left and hills on the right.

Salient Characteristics of Expressive Form (Visual Elements and use of Principles of Design)

Emphasis and Subordination

The main panel portrays man and machine almost as one unit in the central portion of the picture with the large machine dominating the right side and men dominating on the left. The upper panels are large, but more simply painted to keep most visual interest on the main panel. Some of the management figures are painted very exactly, as portraits, while most of the workers are harder to distinguish as individuals.

Value Pattern

Much of the central panel is in tones of grey, black and white representing the steel of the machinery. The human figures have more contrast and color to separate them from the machines, especially in the lower left. The backgrounds of the upper panels are quite dark, but the panel in the center blends with the wall. The lowest panels are painted in tones, much like the machinery though lighter.

Color

The most vivid color is right at the top in the blue of the sky. The colors of the grasping hands, in browns and beiges, along with the stones of the pyramid, are also strongly colored. The colors of the workers' clothing helps to identify them as separate from the machines.

Organization of Illusory Space

The flow of the main panel background work is horizontal from left to right- man to machine and machine to man from right to left and back again. The foreground to background organization flows in the same way. The panel is packed full of imagery; this intricacy creates the sense flow, leading the eye all around the work.

Directional Forces/Implied Lines

Horizontal lines often serve to separate human- dominated areas from machine- dominated areas; in fact the humans seem to dominate most of the horizontal spaces while the machines and the supports dominate the vertical. The machines also have most of the circles and sharper curves and lines while the workers are more softly curved. There is a triangle of massive figures including the two large humans at the top with the machine at the bottom. The white wall leads the eye between these masses.

Rhythm and Repetition

Since the central panels are all wider than they are long, much of the repetition comes from this general shape. Circular shapes repeat often; associated with the machinery. Crystalline shapes show up in the corners of many of the upper panels and many hands reach heavenward.

Comprehensive Description of Narrative and/or Context (historical, religious, biographical, and/or mythological)

Diego Rivera was a part of the Marxist/communist/socialist movements of the 1920's and 1930's. At the time he painted this mural, he hoped that machines would lead to the demise of the capitalist system by freeing the workers from toil. He was also very impressed with the looks and lines of machinery which represented progress and eventual utopia to him. Machines are helping humans achieve this end with the workers also all helping each other. In this work man is freed of the demands of working the earth.

Research Sources Consulted (use MLA citation)

Style/Artist Cross Check in ArtForms (chapter title, subheading, and page number):
Chapter 22- Between World Wars, Political Protest, pp 411- 412, 127-128.

Description of relevant information from the textbook applied to other research and your context summary:

Mexican social realism and murals used to portray Mexican history and society before and during their revolution are mentioned.

General Background Sources for relevant content of Narrative, Context, Mythology, History, and/or Artist Biography, etc. (complete URL or MLA citations)

1. Hamill, Pete. *Diego Rivera*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 1999
2. Davies, Denny, Hofrichter, Jacobs, Roberts, Simon. *Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition, 7th Edition*. Pearson Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2007: 1026-1027.
3. Rochfort, Desmond. *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, CA: 1993. Illustration: 129.

(Note: I got my version of the mural from this book (#3) because of sizing issues; however, it seems to be printed *reversed* in this book, with the large machine on the left. Some photos on page 127 of the same book show it in what I take to be the right way around. It is shown with the large machine on the right in the *Diego Rivera* book (#1), which I think is the right way. I printed it reversed from the book image for this report.) Also I couldn't find a size for this work- not even in our textbook.

4. Wikipedia: Detroit Industry (Also shows large machine on right.)

Style and content information from Authoritative Published Source (Art Reference Book)

History of Modern Art shows a wall of “Detroit Industry” and calls Diego Rivera a Mexican Muralist whose works range from neoclassical to cubist style. He was influenced by Aztec and Mayan art. He was a political activist and a communist. *Janson’s* adds that he shunned easel painting as elitist and preferred murals featuring indigenous peoples to display for the masses. He looked upon science and communism as twin tools of progress.

Authoritative Published Source/Art Reference Book (use MLA citation)

H. H. Arnason. *History of Modern Art: Printing, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*, 5th Edition. Pearson Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2004: 399-402.

Special Signifiers (Subject Matter, Focal Points, Details)

1) Important Personal Associations

I tend to identify with the female workers in the mural though most of them are engaged in more traditional occupations for women such as the secretarial pool in the upper left panel and what may be sewing for upholstery or car interiors in the upper right of the main panel. I see the things of the earth portrayed on top of the man/machine instead of below, where I would expect to place them. I find the machinery overwhelming but not frightening; it is just hard to tell where the people fit in to this world. I get the feeling it could run quite well on its own. Even without the workers this would be a fine mural- one with a machine’s heart instead of a human’s.

2) Researched Associations and Iconography

The mammoth stamping press could be associated with Tlaloc the Rain God and/or Coatlicue a malevolent goddess from native Mexican religion.

Sources: Hamill, Pete. *Diego Rivera*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1999: 156-157.

Four thorough descriptions of specific *interactions* of Subject Matter, Form, Narrative/Context, and/or Iconography in your image. Use complete sentences to link evidence from personal observation with evidence from contextual research

1. The idea of the machine as a life-giving rain god and/or a destroying goddess shows a truth that we still wonder about today: technology has always been both and both aspects of it affect our lives.
2. The lines and curves in the image both join and separate the human and mechanical roles portrayed. The individual humans help the machine; the grouped humans help each other.
3. Placing the block of the large stamping machine to one side creates a sense of imbalance. This machine takes up so much space both horizontally and vertically that all the humans in the image, with their main presence in the horizontal area to the left and center can’t match it.
4. The simply painted god-like figures and hands in the top panel with their large size seem to balance the composition in regard to the large machine more than the elements of the main panel. I see a triangle with the Asian figure at the top the white figure in one corner and the machine at the bottom corner with the white wall generally outlining the bottom.

Summarize and unify the evidence above using complete sentences. Develop a complex and complete description of what theme this image and its context suggest to you about your topic.

At first glance this mural seems straightforward enough- men and machines are building automobiles for America. The machine is dominating the human figures in most of the main panel work, however, which is a little threatening. The ambiguity of this image begets some questioning of whether the machine is benefiting the workers or ultimately harming them. Will it take over? Will that be a good thing or not? Even though the ideals that gave this mural life are thought of as merely an interesting bit of history we are still asking this question about our technology. Does technology make things better or worse for workers or- just different from what was before?

One sentence summary: 1) a relevant, significant and thematic interpretation your topic based on 2) essential aspects of observed form and 3) researched context.

The harmonious flow of machine to man and back again suggests an ideal world for the worker; however the dominating presence of the machine could be a warning against letting the machine take too much power away from the humans who control it.

Virtual Museum of Labor listed by Artist, Style, Date, and Title:

- #1 Jean- Francois Millet, Realism, 1860-1862, "Man with a Hoe"
- #2 Dorothea Lange, Documentary, 1936, Tobacco Country"
- #3 Diego Rivera, Mexican Muralist/ Social Realism, 1932-1933, South wall, "Detroit Industry"
- #4 _____

