MEN AT THE CROSSROADS: THE UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIP OF DIEGO RIVERA AND THE ROCKEFELLERS

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Since its inception, art has been a tool of communication. Whether depicting animal migrations on cave walls, portraiture of nobles, or political propaganda, art has always put forth the view of the creator. One artist who understood this was Diego Rivera. Before receiving the patronage of the Rockefeller family and becoming a household name in the United States during the 1930s, he was well-known in his native Mexico for creating outspoken murals railing against imperialism and capitalism. The Rockefellers were, as Martin Morse Wooster describes them, the "first family of American patronage of the arts."[1] Diego Rivera's unlikely partnership with these paragons of the very values his art spoke against was perhaps one of the most odd and confusing events of the time. What would have motivated the Rockefellers to gamble on a relationship with Rivera, and exactly why did Rivera accept? Fully aware of who they were working with, both parties willingly stepped into a partnership, yet they could not make it work when both parties decided they would not compromise their values. They set themselves up for failure when they decided to work with each other. What caused the Rockefellers to think such a partnership would work? It was not differing political ideologies, but rather internal and external pressures, unfortunate timing, and the growing stubbornness of Rivera.

Diego Rivera was born on December 8, 1886, in Guanajuato, Mexico, into an upper middle class family.[2] From an early age, his interest in art and drawing had become apparent, and his father, also named Diego, supplied him with blackboards to foster his interests.[3] The young Rivera was extremely inquisitive. With the help of his father, he began reading at the age of five, but because he could not comprehend the internal functions and anatomy of an animal, he felt he unable to draw them and refused. His father gave him biology and anatomy books to study, and his mother demonstrated insect vivisections to encourage his passion.[4] It was a life of privilege and attention; one that allowed him to develop his budding interests and abilities. Yet for many in Mexico, that type of life did not exist. Had Rivera been born into the life of his less well-off contemporaries, or if his parents were not in the position to foster his passions as a young child, he may not have become a world-renowned murali

In 1892 at the age of six, Rivera experienced a complete upheaval in his life. His father was a liberal who expressed his views in favor of land reformation in a semi-weekly paper titled, *Democrata*, and began to feel political pressure from the local Conservative Party.[5] In turn, his

1 Martin Morse Wooster, "Getting and Giving; The First Family of American Patronage of the Arts," Review of *American Medicis: The Rockefellers and Their Astonishing Cultural Legacy* by Suzanne Loebl, *The Weekly Standard* (December 13, 2010).

2 "Artist of the Revolution: Diego Rivera's Artwork Reflected His Ardent Belief in Communism and His Rejection of God, Tradition, and Capitalism," *The New American* (September 7, 2007).

3 Frances Flynn Paine, *Diego Rivera* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 10.

4 *Ibid.*, 11-12.

5 *Ibid.*, 12.

wife, Maria Barrientos, feared for their family's safety and made the decision to leave their home in Guanajuato. The family moved 200 miles southeast and settled in Mexico City. This move drastically altered young Rivera's life. His demeanor to soured, and he fought with other boys his age. Things quickly began to turn around when he became close with his great-aunt, Mama Totota. She exercised a key role in reinvigorating his passion for reading by introducing new subjects like physics and chemistry.[6] In 1894, at the age of seven, he began school but stayed only three months. It was during this time that he was introduced to the study of history, which in turn led to a growing interest in military history. His newfound enthusiasm for the military reignited his creativity, and he began to draw once more. In 1897, Rivera enrolled in night classes at the Preparatory School and the Academy of the Bellas Artes. Now at the age of ten, Rivera began to drift from doodling to the more complex skills required for tasks such as watercolor paintings of landscapes.[7] After another decade of study and artistic development, Rivera decided to travel to Europe. During this period, Rivera found himself defining his beliefs and ideologies; the same ideas that he would depict in his art.

In 1907, as Rivera traveled through Mexico on his way to Europe, he stopped in Vera Cruz. There he witnessed an ongoing strike among the workers in the textile industry where many soldiers under the command of Porfirio Diaz had been killed. Diaz was the oppressive dictator of Mexico, who ruled continuously from 1884-1911, and by witnessing the riot, Rivera felt connected to the workers and sympathized with their efforts.[8] This event was likely the first stepping stone on his path towards the Communist Party. Between 1907 and 1910, Rivera travelled throughout western Europe to Spain, France, Belgium and England, and during the trip, he made friends with people from all walks of life, including a group of Russian exiles. They "lived among professional revolutionaries," he remembered. "Their life was one of black misery, sustained only by reports of riots in Russia and their own Utopian dreams."[9] They ignited a fire in Rivera to seek social change and speak out against social injustice. In his autobiography, Rivera described his feelings: "I sought a way to incorporate my increasing knowledge and deepening emotions concerning social problems. Two great French artists, Daumier and Coubret, lit my path as with great torches. In their work they had achieved a synthesis very much like that which one day would liberate me."[10] In June 1910, Rivera was eager to travel back to Mexico and be with the people there.[11]

Then he returned to Mexico, Rivera spent much of his time studying art masters, such as El Greco, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, who had deeply inspired him during his first visit to Europe. In 1914, Rivera held his first Modern Art Exhibition in Madrid, Spain. After two years in Spain, he travelled to France, a tumultuous time because of World War I. His experiences in Paris metamorphosed his painting style. Because of the Great War, he and his Russian friends believed that art could be transformed into a voice for the masses. During this time, Rivera studied art in a new way to reflect his new voice. In 1920, Rivera travelled to Italy where he decided he wanted to translate his knowledge and skills into mural painting. While in Italy, he completed more than three-hundred sketches. Many "depicted street clashes between socialists and fascists," he said. "I often sketched while bullets whistled around my

6 *Ibid.*, 13.

7 *Ibid.*, 13.

8 *Ibid.*, 17.

9 Diego Rivera and Gladys March, *My Art, My Life; an Autobiography* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960), 30.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Paine, *Diego Rivera*, 20.

ears."[12] Rivera was now more certain than ever that art should be used as a tool for the people. He left for Mexico in August, 1921, where he felt he could be accepted. With "the landlord dictator, Venustiano Carranza" having failed to measure up to his promises of reform, had been "overthrown by the peasants and workers" and replaced by Alvaro Obregón who served as Mexico's president from 1920 to 1924.[13] Rivera welcomed the change: "An artist with my revolutionary point of view could now find a place in Mexico."[14]

Figure 1

Upon returning to Mexico, Rivera was profoundly inspired by the history and landscape of his homeland, and he immediately sought permission to create his first mural in the Amphitheater of the Preparatory School in December, 1921. The mural was meant to convey the economic, political and social problems that Mexico was experiencing. This was the first evidence of social progressivism in Rivera's work, not only through the message but in the means of showcasing. At this time, the Mexican government was putting in effort to revitalize the arts and reconnect the population with its pre-colonial past.[15] Rivera's mural spoke to the public. Never before had there been something like this, and he continued to depict issues that facing his country. In 1927, during a rally consisting of several thousand peasants from varying leftist groups, such as the Agrarian Party and Communist Party, who were attempting to return Obregón to the presidency once more, Rivera heard a voice say: "Diego, here at last are your paintings."[16] At this time, he accepted an invitation into the *Partido Communista Mexicano* (PCM), and after being invited by the Commission of Public Education of the Soviet Union to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, he travelled to the Soviet Union. At this point, Rivera's political ideologies began to align with his art. He illustrated the cover of *Krasnaia niva*, a Soviet journal, in 1928 [Fig. 1]. The central figure is cloaked in red, clearly meant to symbolize Communism, and a worker to the right appears powerful and angry, a voice of the revolution.[17]

Rivera's upbringing in a sympathetic leftist family as well as his life experiences shaped his early career. Witnessing the worker riots left an everlasting impression on him and caused him to be sympathetic towards the working class, a sentiment that stay with him throughout his life. World War I caused him to value the fragility of human life and left him disgusted by the outcomes of imperialism. Rivera's Russian friends inspired him to use art as a means

12 Rivera and March, *My Art, My Life,* 72.

13 Cheryl E. Martin and Mark Wasserman, *Latin America and Its People*, Vol. 3 (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2012), 323.

14 Rivera and March, *My Art, My Life,* 72.

15 Michael E. Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution: Diego Rivera's Artwork Reflected his Ardent Belief in Communism and His Rejection of God, Tradition and Capitalism," *The New American* (September 17, 2007).

16 Paine, *Diego Rivera*, 31.

17 Cover of the Soviet journal *Krasnaia niva* with an illustration by Rivera, no. 12, March 17, 1928. Figure one is an offset lithograph printed in color, 12 x 9" (22.8 x 30.4 cm). © 2011 Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS). Photograph courtesy Editorial RM.

of communicating with the people, and more importantly, to express their voices. Creating murals to be used as socialist propaganda, he caught the eye of the Mexican Communist Party.[18] Rivera became a political figurehead, drawing the attention of many influential architects and organizations in the United States that became his patrons.

In 1929, the PCM expelled Rivera over factional disputes, but this did not alter his political viewpoint, and he continued to identify as a Communist. Rivera made his way north into the United States in 1930 to work on a series of murals for the San Francisco Stock Exchange, an ironic choice of work for a Communist, but this was not the last time that Rivera would choose to work for an unlikely patron. Most likely, Rivera's increasing popularity and reputation as a respected artist caused his political ideologies to be overlooked as he attracted the attention of project architects and developers. In his autobiography Rivera stated that he was "enormously excited" with the offer of $4,000 for the completion of two murals, the largest sum he would receive to date.[19] It may seem strange that the San Francisco Stock Exchange was interested in Rivera, but according to political scientist Paul Kengor, "the American communist movement took flight in the 1930s during the zenith of the Great Depression, when people were so desperate that they were looking anywhere for solutions to their economic misery—even to the farthest regions of the political left, i.e., all the way towards communism."[20] Declassified documents at the Library of Congress show a rise, though not dramatic, in the numbers in the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) during that same time.[21]

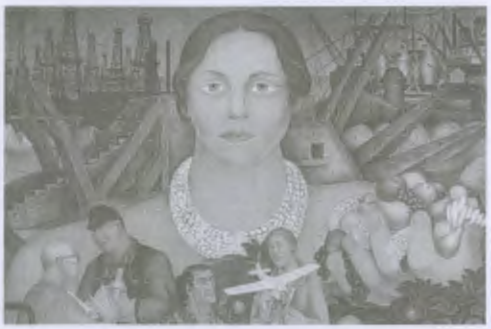

Figure 2

Rivera's work for the San Francisco Stock Exchange proved to the public that while his budding reputation was built being a political artist that "condemned conquistadors and colonialists," he proved that he could set aside his political views and paint tastefully for a client.[22] In *Allegory of California* [Fig. 2], the mural for the Stock Exchange, Rivera showcased Califia, for whom California was named, and depicted the varying aspects for which California was known. On one side of Califia, he depicted California's gold mines and its oil; on the other side, he portrayed the agricultural sector. Rivera was captivated by the landscape California offered.[23] According to Rivera biographer Frances Flynn Paine, "the color of the landscape enchanted him with its mass of ochre, red and orange yellow, but he liked the cities above all."[24] It is possible that the beauty of California inspired him to

18 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

19 Rivera and March. *My Art, My Life.*

20 Paul Kengor, "Red Herring: The Great Depression and the American Communist Party," *Grove City College* (Fall 2008) 1.

21 *Ibid.,* 1-2.

22 Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, "Diego Rivera: Painting and Partisanship," *Third Text,* 28, no. 3 (2014): 269-70.

23 Diego Rivera, *Allegory of California,* 1930-1931. Fresco. 43.82 square meters.
http://museumca.org/2014/curatorial-tour-fertile-ground-and-songs-and-sorrows

24 Paine, *Diego Rivera,* 35.

set aside his political agenda, in order to capture the spirit of the state. *Allegory of California* demonstrated that Rivera could indeed produce work that did not further his political agenda, especially in the United States.

Rivera's work for the San Francisco Stock Exchange was his gateway into the United States. Nearing the completion of the mural for the San Francisco Stock Exchange, Rivera met William Valentinier and Edgar Richardson of the Detroit Institute of Art. Rivera mentioned to them that he would like to paint a series of murals representing the industries of the United States. His dream soon became a reality when Edsel Ford, president of the Ford Motor Company and chairman of the Detroit Institute of Art, invited him to Detroit. Ford agreed to let Rivera "paint subjects of my own choosing on the walls of the inner garden courtyard."[25] While working on the *Detroit Industry Murals*, Rivera spent much of his time at Ford's River Rouge factory and with Henry Ford. In his article, "The Battle of Detroit and Anti-Communism in the Depression Era." Alex Goodall, senior lecturer at University College London, analyzes the impact Henry Ford had on Rivera's reputation. "The artist was under attack from both left and right in his native country," Goodall writes, "accused respectively of disloyalty to the Comintern (Communist International) and to the increasingly anti-communist nation."[26] Rivera was seen as a hypocrite for working with Ford whose "reputation as a ruthless and uncompromising industrial anti-communist was virtually unparalleled."[27] A younger Rivera once had witnessed textile workers striking against the kind of economic power Ford embodied, yet there he was, in Detroit creating murals. Goodall provides examples of Ford's anti-Semitic and anti-communist views, particularly those that "earned him a place of affection amongst the highest echelons of Nazi Germany, a medal of achievement from Hitler, and the 'honor' of being the only American mentioned in *Mein Kampf*."[28] Goodall credits Ford's charisma for winning over Rivera, noting that on several occasions the two of them spent hours at a time conversing over their shared love of technology.[29] Henry Ford, a proclaimed anti-communist, however, was not anti-Soviet. He respected the Soviet Union for its rapid progression in industrialization, and his may have been enough to create a genuine friendship with Rivera.

But Goodall poses the question: "Given Henry Ford's profound anti-unionist and anti-Semitic anti-communism, one must ask how Rivera could have accepted money from the Ford Motor Company to work on a commission whilst still professing to be a revolutionary?"[30] Could it have been their shared love of technology that created a bond stronger than their political ideologies? Paid $21,000 out of the $40,000 annual budget for Detroit Institute of Art, did Rivera simply sell out altogether?[31] Goodall credits to Edsel Ford, who acted as a mediator between Rivera and his father, Henry.[32] Rivera wanted to create a series of murals depicting industries in the United States, and this motive possibly nullified his political partisanship. But Rivera experienced backlash from several fronts. Religious groups were offended by the secular nature of the murals, and while his themes of socialism still generated controversy, he

25 Rivera and March, *My Art, My Life*, 108.

26 Alex Goodall, "The Battle Of Detroit And Anti-Communism In The Depression Era," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 02 (2008): 460.

27 *Ibid.*, 462.

28 *Ibid.*, 463.

29 *Ibid.*, 464.

30 *Ibid.*, 463.

31 *Ibid.*, 462.

32 *Ibid.*

remained a prominent, marketable artist in the United States and completed two major works of art commissioned by well-known capitalist figures.[33]

The Rockefellers could have assumed the trend would continue with their patronage. Their name had become synonymous with wealth and success, a true symbol of the "American Dream."

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his wife,Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, funded and co-created the New York's Museum of Modern Art, and wanted a Rivera mural for Rockefeller Center. But a commission seemed at odds with Rivera's political views. "It would not have appeared so hypocritical," argues Goodall, "had Rivera not previously used his work to attack the Ford and Rockefeller families, and the world of high finance."[34] In the fresco *Wall Street Banquet* completed for the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, Rivera portrayed Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, and J.P. Morgan at a table eating spaghetti that resembled ticker tape spilling onto a serving dish [Fig. 3].[35] Among other frescoes in the same series was one entitled *Our Bread* meant to highlight the stark disparity of wealth in America. In it, the poor share bread with one another.[36]

Figure 3

While Rivera often let his art speak for him, in the Fall 1932 he had published an article, "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," in which he discussed how art, specifically modern art, could be used as a revolutionary tool, primarily in dealing with light social class issues.[37] Goodall calls Rivera an "aesthetic guerilla" and it is clear to see why.[38] In "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," Rivera wrote:

> Giotto [di Bondone] was a propagandist of the spirit of Christianity, the weapon of the Franciscan monks of his time against feudal oppression, [Pieter] Bruegel was a propagandist of the struggle of the Dutch artisan petty bourgeoisie against feudal oppression. Every artist who has been worth anything has been a propagandist... I want to be a propagandist of Communism and I want to be it in all that I can think, in all that I can speak, in all that I can write, and in all that I can paint. I want to use my art as a weapon.[39]

Interestingly enough, the same year Rivera's article was published, from May to October, Rivera and Nelson Rockefeller, son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and director of Rockefeller Center, had been negotiating terms on the size, scale, and color for the mural Rockefeller

33 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

34 Goodall, "The Battle Of Detroit," 461.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Diego Rivera, *Wall Street Banquet*, fresco, Ministry of Education, Mexico City, 1927-8.

37 Diego Rivera. "Revolutionary Spirit of Modern Art." *The Modern Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1932).

38 Goodall, "The Battle Of Detroit," 461.

39 Rivera, "Revolutionary Spirit of Modern Art."

would commission Rivera to complete.[40] Rivera's desire "to be a propagandist of Communism" certainly foreshadowed his upcoming work.

The Rockefellers provided substantial patronage to the arts, and among their other contributions, they helped form the Mexican Arts Association whose mission was to "promote friendship between the people of Mexico and the United States by encouraging cultural relations and the interchange of fine and applied art."[41] This Association was founded in 1930 just after President Herbert Hoover introduced his "Good Neighbor Policy."[42] Intended to improve relations in Latin America, the new foreign policy benefited from the creation of the Mexican Arts Association, an organization designed solely for the purpose of highlighting Mexican artistic achievements. Since the Rockefellers were connected to the Mexican Arts Association, combined with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's love for modern arts, Rivera became a candidate to create a mural for the Museum of Modern Arts. At the request of Abby Rockefeller, Rivera was approached in 1932 to collaborate with the Rockefellers to create what would become *Man at the Crossroads*. Initially Abby Rockefeller was supposed to be in charge of the project, but when she became ill, her son Nelson took over during negotiations.[43] This change of administrators altered the intended course of the mural and brought along a whole host of new difficulties. Early in the negotiations, Nelson Rockefeller set guidelines for the mural:

> The philosophical or spiritual quality should dominate... We want the paintings to make people pause and think and to turn their minds inward and upward...We hope these paintings may stimulate not only a spiritual awakening. Our theme is NEW FRONTIERS. To understand what we mean by 'New Frontiers,' look back at the development of the United States as a nation. Today our frontiers are of a different kind. Man cannot pass up his pressing and vital problems by 'moving on.' He has to solve them on his own lot. The development of civilization is no longer lateral. It is the cultivation of man's soul and mind, the coming into a fuller comprehension of the meaning and mystery of life.[44]

While it seemed Rockefeller had an idea of what he wanted the mural to depict, it was not clear at all. Perhaps he assumed his guidelines left Rivera room for interpretation. As an artist, Rivera expected his own "philosophical or spiritual qualities should dominate." This became explicit when only months later he announced, "I want to be a propagandist of Communism and I want to be it in all that I can think, in all that I can speak, in all that I can write, and in all that I can paint. I want to use my art as a weapon."[45] It is unclear, however, if Rivera was motivated to accept this job to act as a purposeful, self-serving opportunity, or whether it was an afterthought due to the loose guidelines.

Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads* was certainly not what the Rockefellers anticipated. It included, though not in the forefront, the face of Vladimir Lenin, the Russian revolutionary. But the United States had recently experienced a Red Scare, and the public might not welcome

40 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

41 Bertrand M. Patenaude, "The battle of Rockefeller Center," *Hoover Digest* 3 (2013): 169.

42 Alan McPherson, "Herbert Hoover, Occupation Withdrawal, and the Good Neighbor Policy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* no. 4: 623. p. 623.

43 Wendy Jeffers, "Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Patron of the Modern." *Magazine Antiques*, 166, no.5 (November 2004): 125.

44 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

45 Rivera, "Revolutionary Spirit of Modern Art."

a portrait of a Communist leader in a prominent space like Rockefeller Center, especially one funded by the country's principal, capitalist family. After Rivera refused to remove Lenin's image, Nelson Rockefeller rejected the mural and had it destroyed. Thus, to analyze *Man at the Crossroads*, it is necessary to examine *Man, Controller of the Universe* [Fig. 4], a stylistically similar mural created for the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* in Mexico City. A notable addition to the second version is that Rivera "made sure Junior was added to the group of plutocrats doomed by venereal disease."[46] The mural contains many scenes, all of which carry their own distinct message. Prior to the destruction of *Man at the Crossroads,* Rivera had described his work:

> [My] panel will show the Workers arriving at a true understanding of their rights regarding the means of production which has resulted in the planning of the liquidation of Tyranny, personified by a crumbling statue of Caesar, whose head has fallen to the ground. It will also show the Workers of the cities and the country inheriting the Earth. This is expressed by the placing of the hands of the producers in the gesture of possession over a map of the world.[47]

He highlighted the infamous portrayal of Lenin to the right of the central figure. The description provided by Rivera, in itself, sounds reminiscent of the Russian Revolution with strong Communistic tones. Rivera provided Nelson Rockefeller this description along with a sketch and he approved it on November 14, 1932.[48] It is baffling that Rockefeller would have approved the sketch with Rivera having been so blunt on what he was going to create. It is questionable that the tipping point of the mural was the insertion of Lenin, because even without it, it still would have had been a strong piece of Communist propaganda.[49]

Fig. 4

Some believe that Rivera's bold move was caused by outside pressure from the Communist Party. The *Daily Worker* believed Rivera was a pawn being used by the Rockefellers so he set out to prove them wrong. In 1933, Nelson Rockefeller had visited Rockefeller Center to view the artist's progress, and at this point, Rivera had completed the portrait of Lenin in the mural. Nelson Rockefeller sent a letter to Rivera:

> I noticed that the most recent portion of the painting you had included a portrait of Lenin. This piece is beautifully painted but it seems to me that his portrait, appearing in this mural, might easily seriously offend a great many people. If it were in a private house it would be one thing, but this situation is therefore quite different. As much as I dislike to do so I am afraid we must ask you to substitute the face of some unknown man where Lenin's face now appears.[5050]

Had Rivera not inserted Lenin in the mural it is plausible that *Man at the Crossroads* would still exist. Surprisingly Nelson Rockefeller, despite complaints in the press, stood by Rivera's mural, aside from the portrait of Lenin, but his support surely risked tarnishing his family's name.

46 Wooster, "Getting and Giving."

47 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

48 *Ibid.*

49 Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, mural, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 1934.

50 Telzrow, "Artist of the Revolution."

Rivera never tried to hide his beliefs. The series of murals at the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, showed his true sentiments by mocking Wall Street in his fresco *Wall Street Banquet*, which depicted not one, but two of his future clients. While Rivera had puzzling partnerships with clients in the United States, it would be *Man at the Crossroads* that caused him to stop at his own personal crossroads and test his integrity. Even though it is unclear as to whether or not the Rockefellers had more to gain or lose by taking on Rivera, it would have been impossible to be unaware of his political leanings. Abby Rockefeller had bought his sketchbook from his time in the Soviet Union in 1927-1928.[5151] The public certainly voiced their opinions ranging from outrage and criticism of Rivera for his audacity, or vice-versa, criticism of the Rockefellers for thinking they could buy creative rights from an artist.[5252]

E.B. White, American author and contributor to *The New Yorker*, published a poem in response to the failed partnership between Diego Rivera and the Rockefellers. Offering a critical view of Rockefeller's attempt to have Rivera paint anything other than what he was known for.

> I paint what I paint, I paint what I see, I paint what I think, said Rivera/And the thing dearest in life to me in a bourgeois hall is Integrity… /It's no good taste in a man like me, Said John D's grandson, Nelson. /To question art's integrity or mention a practical thing like a fee, but I know what I like to a large degree, thou art I hate to hamper./ For twenty-one thousand conservative bucks you painted a radical./I say, shucks, I could never rent the offices- The capitalistic offices. /For this, as you know, is a public hall. And people want doves, or a tree in fall.[53]

While White credits Rockefeller for not wanting to destroy the art Rivera had produced, ultimately, it was a fool's choice for Rockefeller to pick Rivera when someone else could paint "doves, or a tree in fall."

Diego Rivera, an internationally renowned artist, equally famous for his art as well as his beliefs, sought to bring his ideas and views to life. His most infamous work, *Man at the Crossroads* no longer exists for that very reason. From a young age, Rivera was destined to align with the political left, and his temper and tenacity, which saw him through schoolyard fights and witnessing the Great War, were enough to set him up to fight for his ideas. There were logical reasons why the Rockefellers believed they could have hired Rivera to create a non-partisan mural, however, creative choices and outside influences forced Rivera's hand. The political pressure he felt from the *Partido Communista Mexicano* certainly proved unfortunate timing for the Rockefellers. Rivera's work at the San Francisco Stock Exchange, spurred by an unexpectedly high commission as well as his murals in Detroit, which indulged his fascination with technology and industry, served to satisfy his interests beyond political ideology. The commission for Rockefeller Center did neither. With its vague and loose guidelines and with no centralized voice from his patrons, it provided the necessary fuel to ignite Rivera's political spark. This, combined with his rising fame, political clout, and the call from outside forces to stand behind his ideological principles, created a perfect storm that would result in the ultimate failure of *Man at the Crossroads*.

51 Jeffers, "Abby Aldrich Rockefeller," 125.s name, Rivera surely could have tarnished his family'eat from the press, stood by Rivera' much as I dislike to do so I am afrai

52 "Row on Rivera Art Still on Deadlock," *The New York Times*, May 11, 1933; Gabriel Larrea, "A Painter Undeniably Has Author's Rights," *Diego Rivera Lost in Paradise* (Mexico City: Edicupes, 1987), 195-98.

53 E.B. White, "I Paint What I See," *The New Yorker*, May 20, 1933.