

The Formation of the Artist: Jean Charlot's French Period

by John Charlot

Jean Charlot's French period—from his birth on February 7, 1898, to his departure for Mexico in the early 1920s—was crucial for his development and for our understanding of his art and personality.

For all his varied ethnic background—French, Russian, Spanish, Jewish, and Aztec Indian—my father identified himself as French. Towards the end of his life, on being honored by the Alliance Française of Honolulu, he ended his speech of thanks by stating that, despite all his travels and his feelings for the places he had lived in, he still remembered his home in France. He then recited the famous poem of Joachim du Bellay in which he calls that person happy

who after a long voyage can return to his home; for the dwelling of his forefathers pleases the poet more than the grandeur of Rome:

Et plus que l'air marin la douceur Angevine.

(And more than the air of the sea the sweetness of Anjou.)

As an artist, Charlot considered himself a member of the tradition of French classicism, which he traced through Poussin, Ingres, and Cézanne. He felt there were definite characteristics of French art that could be found also in his own work. One such characteristic was an interest in and respect for the object itself rather than as a mere pretext for stylistic exercise. He once contrasted Toulouse-Lautrec's portraits to the work of Piero della Francesca; the Italian was more willing, he argued, to sacrifice the peculiarities of his subject to the demands of his geometric experiments.

Moreover, Charlot believed that certain artistic sensibilities were peculiarly French. Once, when we were on our way to the Detroit Institute of the Arts, he told me how excited he was at the prospect of seeing Poussin's *Diana and Endymion*. When we arrived before the painting, he gazed at it with enormous admiration and delight. Then turning to me, he saw that I was more puzzled than responsive. With some exasperation, he blurted out, "You have to be French to understand it!" Later, when I asked him what he saw in the work, he explained how unusual it was at that time to do a painting "based entirely on color," an unusual view of the piece.

Like many artists, Charlot remained close to his childhood. In a set of lecture notes on points of view, he describes a child who, as he grows, first sees a table from underneath, then sees the thickness of the table from the side, and finally sees the surface of the table top spreading out before him as his eyes emerge above it. Charlot based this passage on his own memories.

Similarly, he had been impressed as a child by a bronze horse of Antoine Louis Barye that had been placed on a dresser in his room. The figure was small, but the horse seemed monumental to Charlot as he looked up at it from his bed. During his final illness, he asked that the same bronze be put on the Korean cabinet next to his bed, reproducing, as he told me, his childhood point of view.

When my father visited Paris in 1968—the first time he had returned after leaving in 1921 for Mexico—we walked together to look at the apartment building in which he had grown up. I suggested we climb the stairs and knock on his old door. “I’m afraid I’d answer it,” he said with a laugh.

Charlot had a life-long interest in children’s art, which represented for him something essential in human nature. All young children are good artists, he said, but very few twelve year olds. At some point, the child’s inborn artistic nature was destroyed, and a break was made between the child and the adult. This did not happen to Charlot.

For this reason perhaps, Charlot kept and carried with him through his many relocations a large amount of material from his childhood. Among his own art works, the two earliest surviving drawings are dated 1900, and large numbers of drawings, cut-outs, and paintings in different media are available from the following years—forming, indeed, a continuous sequence until his death in 1979. Charlot's earliest attempts at forming the alphabet can be found among these sheets, and his productive career as a writer can be



Jean Charlot and his sister Odette
Paris, 1902

followed in some detail through such documents as his letters (the earliest is dictated to a family member), notes, a handmade newsletter on ballooning, and his earliest published articles on the visual arts. Many of these writings are very personal poems, prime documents for our knowledge of his thinking and emotional state. Their number increases during his army service in World War I, when writing was more practical than painting, and production continues through the early Mexican period and sporadically thereafter. Finally, Charlot and his sister Odette, who remained in France, preserved a large number of family documents, including art works by other family members, books, and illustrations of art works that had impressed him. He was able to give me a good deal of information about these materials in a series of interviews I conducted with him in the early 1970s. The entire collection is a uniquely rich resource for the general study of artistic development. I will sketch only a few aspects of Jean Charlot's own formation.

In the earliest photographs of Charlot as an infant and child, he is clearly strabismic. This handicap is now treated by exercise. In Charlot's case, an eye muscle was cut and resewn, an operation that involved a long and painful recuperation, which, along with other things, made him acutely aware of his vision. In fact, Charlot was never capable of true binocular vision or depth perception. This had an obvious impact on his style, notably in those pictures in which the background is treated as a geometric design almost parallel to the picture plane while depth is created by the three-dimensional modeling of the bodies.

Moreover, each of

Charlot's eyes had a different type of vision. In one, his sight was very sharp, but the colors, though present, were very light, in fact, almost tones. In the other eye, the colors were unusually vivid, but the focus was weak. Curiously, these differences reproduce the debate in French art history between the Poussinists, advocates of line, and the Rubenists, champions of color; a false controversy in Charlot's view. Much of his art can be described as a—certainly conscious—exploration of the relation between line and color. For instance, in his mid-1960s series, *Tying Child to Chair*, Charlot traced the same outline drawing onto a set of canvases (imitating his fresco technique of incising the key lines into the wet mortar) and then colored each one differently. In this series, the color often works against the line: the cloth wrapped around the child is drawn three-dimensionally, but its strong and uniform color acts to preserve the two-dimensional picture plane. Throughout his work, Charlot used color in non-realistic, expressive ways.

More fundamentally,

Charlot's problems with his eyes convinced him of the artificiality of sight and the conventionality of its representation in art. Italian perspective was no more natural than architectural renderings; Charlot often quoted a teacher who described Italian perspective as the view of a man with his head nailed to a wall and one eye poked out. Accordingly, he chose to explore other methods, conventions, or aesthetics. These were, however, connected to other cultures, other ways of seeing, expressing, and living. That is, Charlot's artistic search led to his questioning the society in which he was

being reared and to his exploration of different ways of life. Ultimately, Charlot connected ways of seeing to ways of thinking and decided to use his art to make people see and thus think differently.

A striking quality of Charlot's childhood art work is its abundant imagination, which coexists with a precocious knowledge of the history of art. Throughout his life, that imagination could reveal itself in sometimes disturbing ways. When he read the newspaper report of the accidental death of a blind university colleague, he remarked, "It must be terrible to be a blind man in a burning car."

His imagination was naturally connected to his appreciation of art. In the mid-1950s, we were invited to tea at the New York apartment of a former patron of his. I noticed that my father was being unusually reticent (and I wanted him to shine). Suddenly, without a word, he got up and walked over to a Van Gogh landscape hanging on the other side of the room. He looked at it for a while and then resumed uncomfortably his seat. When on leaving I asked him what was wrong, he said, "I couldn't think of anything but Van Gogh's ear."

Dreams were inevitably important for him. At a dinner with a psychiatrist in the early 1960s, he recalled dreaming as an adolescent of leaving his bed, going down to the servants' quarters, and pounding with both fists on the door of the maid's bedroom. More unusual, he found as a youngster that he could dream in continuity; he could take up at night the dream he had awakened from in the morning. He then

found that he could control his dreaming, creating situations in order to experience them. For instance, he wondered what it would be like to have his head cut off and then visit his family and friends holding it under his arm. He stopped such experiments when he found himself being drawn ever more strongly into his dream world and detaching himself from his family and friends to return early to bed.

Throughout his life, his dreams could be both disturbing—for instance, soft, unattractive faces pressed up to his—and involving.



Anne Goupil Chabot, the Artist's Mother
Mexico, 1920s

While I was assisting him on the 1958 fresco *Compassionate Christ* on Kaua'i, he and I shared a hotel room. One morning, he lingered in bed, rather than getting right up. When I asked him why, he said he had been dreaming of doing a fresco with the subtlest, most beautiful colors. I said I thought those of *Compassionate Christ* were among his best. "These were much better," he said, and lay a little longer thinking about them.

Charlot's imagination seems to have been connected to his unusual capacity for insight into other cultures. After a visit to Fiji, he experienced a remarkable surge of production, mostly connected to Fijian themes and sights. One afternoon, he found a painting taking shape under his fingers, the subject of which he couldn't place: a frightened Fijian mixing a bowl of *kava* in the forest at night. When he showed the painting to some Fijians studying in Hawai'i, they asked him with some surprise how he knew about *that*: he had depicted a sorcerer at work, hiding in the forest, afraid of the night, but anxious not to be detected and killed.

Charlot was interested in the workings of his mind, in the process of creativity, and once sought a grant to describe it fully: "I really thought I could paint a picture and describe what was going on inside of me at the same time." In his youth, however, such unusual experiences must have been problematic. He early made notes on a book about the relation of art to madness.

A stabilizing as well as inspiring force was religion. Charlot's mother was an unusually devout Roman Catholic, perhaps even mystical

His father was a free-thinker, with connections to the Masons. As a result, religion in Charlot's family was both strong and challenged. Moreover, because of his multi-ethnic family background, he was exposed early to other religions. He remembered staying as a very young child at his Jewish relatives' home and being impressed by a fearsome painting of Moses descending with the tablets from Mount Sinai; "It gave me the idea that other people could be equally serious about their religion."

Aside from an adolescent and only too successful experiment with turning tables (a then fashionable psychic exercise of making a table move by the laying on of hands), Charlot's religious practice was exclusively Catholic. He declined, for instance, an invitation to attend a secret Mexican Indian ceremony, while working as an archeologist in Yucatán. Nonetheless, he sometimes had experiences that would be recognized, for example, by Pacific Islanders as traditionally religious. His series of pictures in several media of pandanus trees growing from lava rocks on which they shed their leaves—against the strong backlight of the sun on the sea—was inspired by hearing drums while sitting in such a grove.

In his childhood and adolescence, Charlot was attracted by mysticism. He had long conversations with an old, indigent woman who had mystical experiences. One day, on entering her room, he found her in a trance and drew her portrait as she slowly returned from it. He took notes on mystical works and was a lifelong admirer of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. That his own religious life did not follow such a direction reveals the strength of three countervailing aspects of his character.

The first was his feeling for the power of the physical and visual. The mystic whom he found most useful was the most visual: Anne-Catherine Emmerich. He gravitated toward the physicality of Catholicism—the ashes smeared on the forehead, the eatable bread of the Eucharist. The central expression of Catholicism was liturgical, a physical expression of the religious, appropriate to a religion of Incarnation. His own art would be liturgical even when the subject matter did not seem to be religious.

The second aspect of his character that turned him away from mysticism was the desire—felt by many extraordinary people—to identify himself with ordinary human beings. In both his art and his life, he avoided élitism and the élite. He wanted his religion to be that of the parishioner. This was not, however, condescension. My father once told me, during a period of my own religious enthusiasm, that he had set out to go through the heavenly mansions, the stages of mystical experience, described by Teresa of Avila: “I started with the first and worked myself slowly through each mansion. And then, when I finally entered the last, I found I was back in the first!” For Charlot, the lives of ordinary people were the ones based most clearly and immediately on the great problems and mysteries of life. Their lives were thus the most revelatory, as were the symbols he distilled from them. In *Work and Rest*, as the Indian mother on her knees grinds the corn to make tortillas, the child on her back is lulled to sleep (Illus. p. 144).

This lifelong identification with the people, in whichever culture he found himself, is

an essential characteristic of Charlot as an artist and a man. This attitude is, of course, part of the Christian emphasis on the poor in body and in spirit, an attitude emphasized by the French Catholic Renaissance of Charlot's youth, with its renewed interest in addressing social problems and in using liturgy, art, and literature to bring the Christian message to the people. Charlot was an admirer of such writers as Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain, who based their radical social reformism on a stringently interpreted Christianity.

Charlot's attitude can, however, be traced more deeply into his childhood. Reared in the highly conventional world of the French upper middle class, the *grands bourgeois*, Charlot reacted strongly against its dehumanizing artificiality. His perception of it was characteristically aesthetic. He remembered one of his aunts stooping to kiss him; to reach her lips high above him, he had to pass level after level of silks, flounces, laces, and furbelows to reach a face set almost undiscoverable amidst its furs, veils, and far-reaching hat. From that world, he could descend into the kitchen, where the old cook, to whom he was devoted, would sit in her simple peasant's clothing, still shaped by a long folk tradition. Later in Mexico, faced with a general pro-Spanish prejudice against the indigenous people and culture, Charlot would fix on clothing as his point of attack: the *grande dame* in her imported finery looked ridiculous beside the classical simplicity of the Indian woman's garb. In his 1924 woodblock print, *Los ricos en el infierno* (The Rich in Hell) are all well dressed, at least in their expensive underwear (Illus. p. 122).

Finally, Charlot's

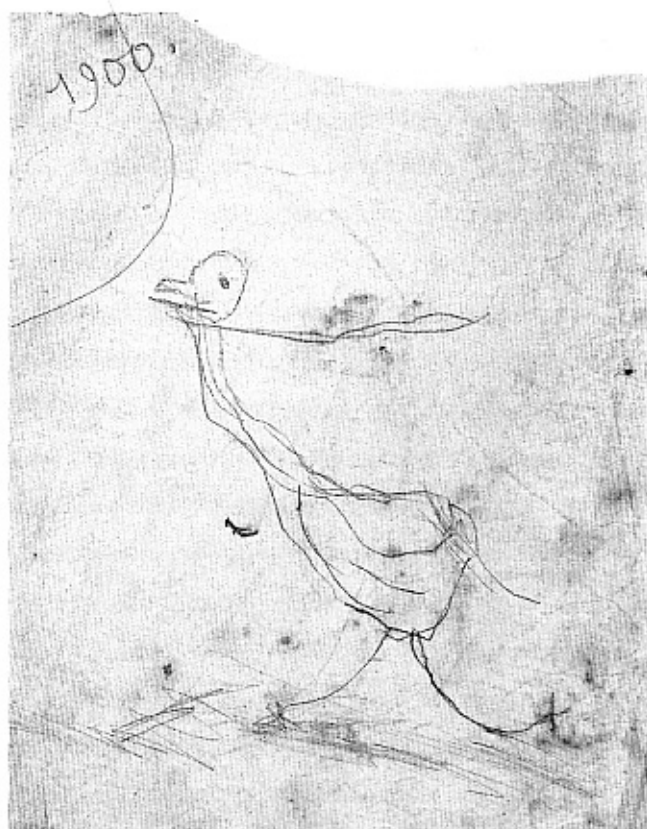
Catholicism directed him to identify his talents and put them to use for the good of others. He once considered joining a monastery in Mexico, but decided against it because it would have stopped him from practicing his art. That art, however, was not to be pursued for its own sake, but with a sense of mission, a sense that directed him early towards liturgical and then more particularly towards public and monumental art.

Charlot's religious

conception of work explains in part the energy and effort that resulted in his unusual productivity. Work was also, I believe, a further stabilizing factor in his life. In it, he could put his sensitivity to use. He once described Cézanne to me as a 19th century French *bourgeois* who was also a painter: "He kept a strictly normal outside to the world, while all the adventure took place in his studio." By adventure, he meant "the experiments, the discoveries." I felt my father was also describing himself: all his life, he avoided the mannerisms associated with artistic behavior. A relative who knew Charlot in childhood remembered him only as a good playmate at a time when he was engrossed in aesthetic and intellectual "adventures": "He never talked about art to me." When I asked my father why he hadn't been interested in a student of his—an excellent artist, who told me she had chased him in the 1930s—he answered, "It was such a *cliché* for a French artist to come to America and marry a millionairess—like wearing a *berêt*." Similarly, Charlot's inartistic older sister Odette remembered that he had been very sweet to her when she was being neglected and he was being treated as the family star: "Without that, my life would have been horrible."

Charlot's choice of career was not immediately clear. He was multitalented. For instance, he had scored very high in mathematics, which won him an appointment very young as an officer in the French artillery (most of the older officers had already been killed).

His three main interests emerged very early in his life. In scholarship, besides following the demanding French curriculum, he was pursuing his own research on Mesoamerican cultures,



Drawing of a Running Bird

Paris, 1900

Charlot Collection

Medieval and early Renaissance literature, and art history. He gathered through his life an immense knowledge of a wide number of fields.

Secondly, his creative writing was so important to him that he had to make a conscious decision to become a visual artist rather than a poet. He would throughout his life return to creative writing, both poetry and drama.

Art, however, was from the earliest records a dominant interest. The two earliest surviving drawings are on a sheet dated 1900: a running bird and a still-life of a bottle on a table. Charlot remembered an earlier drawing of a dog running up a hill. His family had been astonished by it and had passed it around. Charlot's mother was an artist, and the family was quick to recognize and encourage his own work, providing art materials—including a large, red business ledger—and a tutor. Charlot could also study the books and Western, Chinese, and Mexican art works owned by the family. His first drawing of a person was a copy of one by Hokusai in Samuel Bing's *Le Japon Artistique* (Morse 1976:6). He would press his nose against the glass of a large cupboard in which were kept miniature folk sculptures of typical Mexican scenes. Visits to the Louvre and other museums left indelible impressions.

Charlot's parents kept his art works carefully, so his childhood progress can be followed step by step, a progress clarified by his later writings and interviews. He starts with pencil drawings and then begins to fill the outlines with watercolor. At one point he discovers that he can draw with a brush

without using a preliminary pencil sketch, and the color explodes over the page. He then tries new ways of balancing his pencil line and watercoloring.

In his ledger, he seems often to be copying from memory paintings that had impressed him in museums: soldiers with shakos charging downhill; boats in full sail. He makes paper cut-outs, decorates his bedroom with continuous friezes, and illustrates books around their margins. As was his later practice, he often works in series. For instance, in his early adolescence, he did a number of paintings from his parents' Paris bedroom, once surprising them by being hard at work on a sunrise as they awoke, catching the way the sun seemed to cut into the side of a neighboring chimney; he had drawn the side in pencil and now painted over it a half-circle of light.

In his talks and interviews, Charlot often emphasized the emotion of art-making. In perhaps his first oil painting, *Old Woman with Bonnet (Mathilde)*, c. 1911, a portrait of the family cook at Poissy, he started with her folk bonnet and continued down to her face and shoulders. When he painted in outline the curve of her breast, he experienced a strong sexual sensation and stopped, leaving the portrait unfinished. Similarly, he responded with strong emotions to the art works of others; as a child, he was frightened by the Egyptian gods in the Louvre.

Art was also a means of understanding. On the 1900 sheet can be seen two aspects of his art-making. The running bird is all verve, fantasy, and free strokes. The still life is a careful record

of his observation. When Charlot saw the sheet in later life, he was more impressed by the latter drawing; he said he had obviously been looking very carefully at the object, which was unusual for a child around two years of age.

This close looking at an object in order to understand it is a characteristic of much of Charlot's work, especially the portraits and the nudes. A tragic example is the series of drawings done of his father as he was dying and then on his deathbed



Henri Charlot, the Artist's Father

1914

Boarding the train in Germany to return to France

(Illus. p. 99). Henri Charlot and Jean had been in Germany when World War I broke out, the war they realized would destroy the family business. They caught the last train back to Paris, and as it made its slow, halting way, Henri Charlot had a nervous breakdown. Jean kept his father collected and helped him back home and into his bed, from which he would never rise again. As his father lay dying, fluctuating in lucidity, Jean sat by his bedside drawing portraits of a frightening intensity. I am reminded of Akira Kurosawa's definition of an artist as one who doesn't turn away. Similarly, Charlot's gouache *Bullet* faces the on-coming missile directly as it shatters into abstraction the world around its target; the only way, Charlot told me, he could express that war experience.

Basic characteristics of Charlot's expression are present in his work from the very beginning, most especially geometric composition. The 1900 bird runs at a dramatic diagonal; a diagonal is clearly implied in the earlier drawing of a dog running uphill. The 1900 still life has a table corner fitted to the shape of the paper. Geometric designs continue through the childhood drawings: abstract decorations, geometric objects like boats with triangular sails, and geometric compositions such as horses charging downhill, a precursor of Charlot's first fresco, *The Massacre in the Main Temple* of 1922-23 (Illus. pp. 118-121). Such compositions support the graphic personality of the woodblock series of *The Way of the Cross* of 1918-20, with its dramatic diagonals. This lifelong emphasis on geometric composition is one of the reasons Charlot placed himself clearly and consciously in the French classical tradition. He considered Cubism, the modern art of his youth, merely the latest chapter in that tradition.

Charlot's own use of that tradition was not, however, hermetic; on the contrary, geometry should support legibility, a key objective of his art and element of his thinking. Charlot learned reading and writing at the same time he was working on his drawings, and he mixed letters and figures in a variety of ways, for instance, labeling parts of the picture or using letters and words as parts of the composition. In his liturgical work, he imitated Medieval lettered ribbons or scrolling, and in *L'Amitié*, the painting that sums up his French period, such a scroll is a prominent feature (Illus. p. 104). Charlot continued occasionally to use lettering throughout his career, notably in murals.

A number of key aesthetic decisions can be traced back to Charlot's early childhood. On a visit to the Louvre, he was frightened by the staring eyes of an Egyptian god. In his ledger, he drew a picture of the statue and then tried unsuccessfully to obliterate the large eyes by scrawling over them roughly with his pencil. The experience of the statue taught him, he said later, to avoid overly obvious and direct means of expressing the godhead. In the 1960s, a priest complained to me about my father's bronze crucifix: "Where's the face?" I responded that it was all over the body; that is, the whole work took on the expressiveness usually perceived only in the face. To use the face as one's prime means of expression was simply too easy.

Similarly, Charlot was uncomfortable using artistic techniques that did not present a challenge. Thus he used tempera for his portrait of his grandfather, the medium along with the style contributing to the unusual severity and seriousness—the

avoidance of stylishness—of the work. Charlot would use tempera also for *L'Amitié*, rather than oils. In fact, throughout his career, Charlot set himself problems in new and difficult media. As a result, he was often a technical pioneer, as in the revival of fresco in Mexico, the use of color art lithography in the United States, and the use of ceramics for monumental sculpture in Hawai'i.

Charlot's early sources of inspiration are also indications of his venturing beyond the conventional and accepted. He became very learned in the traditional history of art and literature (a young poem contains the line, *J'ai lu tous les livres*, "I've read all the books"), but quickly expanded his research to such subjects as Mesoamerican cultures. In literature, he read widely in Medieval and early Renaissance French, learned folk songs in Brittany during his visit there after his father's death, and wrote poems during the war in the *patois* of the *poilu*, the soldiers of the trenches. This effort can be seen as part of the movement around Paul Claudel to enrich the poetic language, but many of Charlot's special interests would be "discovered" only later, such as the dream poems of Théophile de Viau by the Surrealists.

Besides contemporary artists, Charlot was early influenced by Aztec codices, a number of which had been collected by his granduncle Eugène Goupil and deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He also made a large collection of Images d'Épinal, which, along with the folk woodblocks of Orléans, influenced his printmaking. A major influence, now difficult to trace, was the folk bas-reliefs of Brittany. Charlot produced an entire oeuvre of colored wood reliefs of religious subjects that were included in an exhibition

sponsored by the Gilde Notre-Dame, the liturgical art group to which he belonged. These were all sold or given away after the exhibition, and the only surviving pieces, to my knowledge, are two panels of brightly colored wings, kept in the family because the buyer had them removed from the work he wanted. Charlot remembered showing some of these reliefs to a writer on liturgical art, who took him for a country Breton and encouraged him not to be spoiled by the city and its fashions!

As always, Charlot was interested in the genuine artistic qualities of certain folk arts, not in their picturesqueness. He saw in them the same virtues he found in Stephan Lochner and the Rhine School during his tour of duty in occupied Germany: authentic art values of composition and color along with legibility and effectiveness for the people they were designed to reach. That is, he was joining his core classical tradition to his expanding sources of inspiration. He



Charlot at an Exhibition of the Gilde Notre-Dame

Paris, c. 1916

The two woodcarvings of angels and a woodcut on the wall are Charlot's.

could do this because of the fundamental artistic values each tradition incorporated in its own way. For instance, he found the illustrators of the Aztec codices more cubist than the Cubists.

Already in his French period, Charlot developed a definite rhythm in the progress of his work: an alternation of initial analysis based on geometry and concluding synthesis, often based on an experience of native or folk art. As he entered each new period of his life or work—in France, Mexico, the United States, and the Pacific—he would submit the new sights to a prismatic examination in order to probe with his own eyes and mind their special characteristics. His final synthesis would be influenced also by his scholarly research of and artistic encounter with the art of the place. That is, he combined his personal perception with the art tradition of the given culture to reach an adequate expression of and for the place, an expression that would speak to its inhabitants.

His choice of sources of inspiration was closely connected to his view of the purpose of art. He emphasized throughout his life that art should be pursued not for its own sake, but for the good of others. This view impelled him towards liturgical and public and monumental art, which required a certain cultural continuity in order to be effective.

This perspective defined also his view of the artist. He and his fellow members of the Gilde were much influenced by the then current idea that the builders and decorators of the great cathedrals had been anonymous craftsman; this was opposed

to the Renaissance idea of the artist as genius. This view is now recognized as historically inaccurate, but in the early part of this century, it offered an alternative to those who could not accept the élitist image of art and artists that is still dominant today.

Charlot's first commission, the decoration of a church in Paris, would have enabled him to follow in the tradition of his models. The mural would have been in fresco, a difficult and traditional medium that had a particular, personal significance for Charlot: an older artist he admired, Marcel Lenoir, had tried unsuccessfully all his life to be given a wall on which to paint a monumental fresco.

Charlot's mural would have been the summation of his art up to that time: the design for a processional down both sides of the nave incorporated many of the themes and subjects found in his earlier work. The sunny side featured women and children in the light colors of Maurice Denis, an early influence on Charlot. On the shadowed wall of the nave, men wounded in the war made their way towards the altar.

When the commission was not funded, Charlot was so discouraged about the prospects of such work in France that he left for Mexico, where happily a veritable movement of mural painting would soon begin.

But before he left, foreseeing certainly the stylistic changes to come, he summarized his French period in the large *L'Amitié*, his

"master piece," in the Medieval sense, of the first stage of his life and artistic career. Done in tempera—the closest he could get to fresco—it gives final form to a number of his favored subjects: his pet dog (recalling his very first drawing), portraits, a liturgical angel with lettered scrolling, flowers (the subjects of many of his war-time sketches in his military *carnet*), a cubistic village-scape, and the sunny coast of Brittany.

Charlot left France for Mexico a young man, but he was already a developed artist with a definite direction, philosophy, and personality. He was soon to go through a new period of stylistic development, but the main lines of his work and thinking were already firmly established.

Moreover, many of his characteristics, developed in the French period, would have a decisive effect on the Mexican Mural Renaissance, both as his personal influence and in combination with others: in style, the joining of classical geometric composition with inspiration from native and folk sources; in purpose, public art for the public good; and in self-image, the artist as worker-craftsman rather than aesthete-genius.