

only another newscast. And while I, for one, do not challenge the motives of any of the very important white people, much less the unimportant ones, who descended into Alabama, the veracity of the white involvement there depends upon the vigor and persistence of just these white citizens and multitudes of others like them in every sector of the American democracy where racism is a fact. If the white commitment is not in that way verified, then Selma will have been some feigned expiation, no climax but a mere catharsis which heralds no new or great society but a resurgence of great apathy and a new condescension of white man for Negro citizens.

Selma will be an historic turning point if, on that gruesome Sunday when the posse charged the citizens, the legions of contented, prosperous, white people began at last to comprehend what has been happening to this nation and how the nation could be destroyed — and resolved that such would not take place even if they have to surrender their apathy to prevent it.

—William Stringfellow



ART: The 'Cactus Curtain' Rebel

By
Judy
Stone

At 31, José Luis Cuevas is an "old master" among young Mexican artists.

He is obsessed with death, but conscious of the life beneath the nightmares; filled with hatred for Mexico and her nationalism, restlessly roaming the world, but always returning home; in revulsion against colorful romantic murals of patient Indians and disdainful of attacks on him by Mexican critics, but not impervious to them.

He is attuned to the world of Kafka, Ionesco, Beckett, and Genet, but is not unmindful of the world of Madison Avenue: mass media, midtown; art market, uptown. And this says less about him than it does about our absurd world.

There was plenty of time to absorb Cuevas' macabre grey view when I visited his apartment last January. He was late for our appointment. A maid brought coffee into the simply furnished room; Cuevas' two little daughters peered in and disappeared. The walls were covered with his work: self-portraits of himself as Rembrandt, of himself sketching at

...madhouse
in the
palace ...

Coney Island, as he imagines himself a clown to his daughters; sketches for his autobiography "Cuevas por Cuevas" just published in Spanish and English; framed letters, scrawled and illustrated, that he sent home from New York, Paris, Rome, Morocco, Spain. His original illustrations for *The Worlds of Kafka and Cuevas*, reprinted in the new book. Sombre drawings of the poor, the mutilated, the insane, the funeral of Franco.

Time Magazine calls him "the golden boy"; rich collectors rush to buy his work. Who knows the investment value?

"In the world of Cuevas, the insane have already installed their madhouse in the palace; jesters have become law-givers; buffoons establish moral standards; the blind order executions; and the deformed set themselves up as the image and likeness of the ideal," his friend, the novelist Carlos Fuentes wrote for the catalogue of Cuevas' recent Los Angeles exhibition *Horror Theater*, dedicated to Tod Browning and James Whale, "masters of the horror film."

Through a narrow slit in the catalogue cover, a pair of appraising eyes look out;



José Luis Cuevas

... too
handsome ...

artist, hair brushed down over his forehead. I thought of that famous photo of Truman Capote languidly flaked out on his ornate sofa.

Nothing in the artist's work prepared me for the artist. He was too handsome. Jimmy Dean, Newman, Brando. He belonged to the Hollywood pantheon of rebels. But what would those pale blue-grey, X-ray eyes see in Hollywood?

There was barely time to say hello and recover from that dazzling white smile, when the phone rang. The image of Hollywood exploded as a burst of staccato Spanish and an incredible rush of nervous electricity filled the room. Cuevas, wearing a heavy sheepskin-lined navy foul weather jacket over a black sweater held the phone and paced the floor in his high boots, back and forth, back and forth in a small circle. It was an exhausting performance.

He apologized for the delay. His studio had been burglarized just as he was preparing for a new show in New York. Everything else had been sold at the Los Angeles show.

He went for his scrapbook so that I could see what has already been written about him, and three-year-old Mariana came trotting back with him. She leaned over the heavy scrapbook on my lap, turning each page so that I might admire her father. I murmured "bueno" dutifully and tried to take notes.

... I murmured
"bueno"...

Cuevas spoke of the rheumatic fever which set the direction for his life. As a small boy, he spent two years in bed, reading omnivorously, discovering Dostoevski, and drawing when he wasn't reading. If it had not been for the heart condition, his father, a commercial pilot, would have encouraged him toward a more active profession. As it was, until three years ago, Cuevas used to race around on his motorcycle until he was grounded by a nearly fatal accident and spent three months recovering. He is still unable to drive a car.

By the time he was 14, he had his first show in a loft—sketches of himself with the fever, with mumps; and the ugly dark lines of the prostitutes, the cadavers and the infamous street below his window.

In a newspaper interview during his first professional show at 19, he tried to explain that his subjects might appear French, but the artistic influence was pre-Columbian. He talked about the dictatorial attitudes of the big three: Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco and the closed door of official Mexican art circles toward young painters reaching out in other directions. It brought the wrath of the critics down on his head.

"It is not possible to say anything



Self-Portrait (May 9, 1962)

... big
cactus
curtain ...

against Mexican art," Cuevas said. "The Mexicans are very nationalistic and for them the most important art in the world is Mexican art. Mexican food is the most delicious food; the most beautiful landscape—Mexican land. Because of this nationalistic attitude, the Mexicans live with a very big cactus curtain. The Mexican people look only at this curtain and never see other countries."

Speaking rapidly in English with a quick shrug of irritation when he couldn't find the right word, Cuevas said, "The prestige of the three top Mexican muralists is not for the quality of their painting; it's for political reasons. Like the work of Diego Rivera, it is sometimes very superficial. The very serious and important art centers are not interested in the three. The revolution in Mexican art was not an aesthetic revolution. The subject is the revolution, but the art is not revolutionary. It's reactionary. I understand the attitude of the Mexican artists during the revolution; I don't speak about the men, but about the art and the art is reactionary.

"For me, the biggest mistake in Mexican art is the superficial folklorist with very nice colors. It's nice for American tourists who like souvenirs to show how beautiful the Mexican people are," Cuevas said.

After his first show in the United States at the Pan American Union in Washington in 1954, he publicly criticized the Mexican artists again, saying that they were influenced by the Europeans and that the only really Mexican artist was Tamayo who has done nothing worthwhile for the last ten years since he went commercial.

... since
he went
commercial ...

"As a result, some Mexicans wrote violent articles against me. My response when I read the attacks is to make many shows in different countries." He added proudly that his work had influenced many young artists in Colombia and his influence can also be seen in some work

Mexico City. He has had one-man shows in nine countries, is represented in 20 museum collections and has won three international prizes.

Cuevas said his own first influence was pre-Columbian art, "but my actual expression is the point of view of one young man of this century. I want to express the sense of my time. My influence is that of my counterparts in the silent movies; Kafka, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet. I am not influenced by contemporary painters because my expression is my personal point of view.

"The Mexican artist is in the realistic tradition, but this way is not contemporary," he said. "I am in the new figurative tendency—like the English Bacon—and the Mexican realistic work is in the old academic, realistic way. The Mexican realistic artist is melodramatic like the German expressionists. For the Mexican realistic artist, the subject in the painting is most important and the subject always is very poor.

"In the new figurative, the artist never is melodramatic. He is never compassionate for humanity. The elements in my work are the incongruity and the absurdity of life. I am only the witness of my moment. The socialistic artist, or realistic, is reformatory of society. I am not a reformer."

SILVAN SIMONE GALLERY



Study of a Woman Painter

... the
'sentimental
is immoral' ...

"Buñuel said one thing and it is very good for me, too—"the sentimental is immoral.' I don't like the sentimental attitude of the realistic painters. Maybe in this thing I am a little surrealist.

"For me to make a drawing, or to make love is one human act, but the consequences are not important. Only the act is important. My work is no good for society; my work is no good for reforming. It is only the expression of the moment."

He went on to speak of his hatred for Mexican nationalism and its limiting effect on the Mexican people. "I don't like Mexico," he said—and it's hard not to wonder about the relationship between his non-Mexican appearance and his passionate diatribes. "I am not interested in the Mexican heroes. What is sacred for me? The Mexican flag, the Mexican heroes and the Mexican president are not sacred."

What is?

"Nothing."

Why live here then?

"It is cheaper. It is easy. But I stay in Mexico only three months of the year. I like the U. S. because it is more exciting; New York is very exciting. But I can't stay permanently in any city. I need to change. In New York I can only stay six months. In other countries, four-five months. In Mexico when I stay three months, I am very depressed, very nervous. Mexico is a very insane country. The air is bad, the street and the people are very sordid. In one word, Mexico is very bad for my health. The most ugly and inexpressive people in the world are the Mexican people. I say these things always. It's true. When I say these things I am very frank and honest."

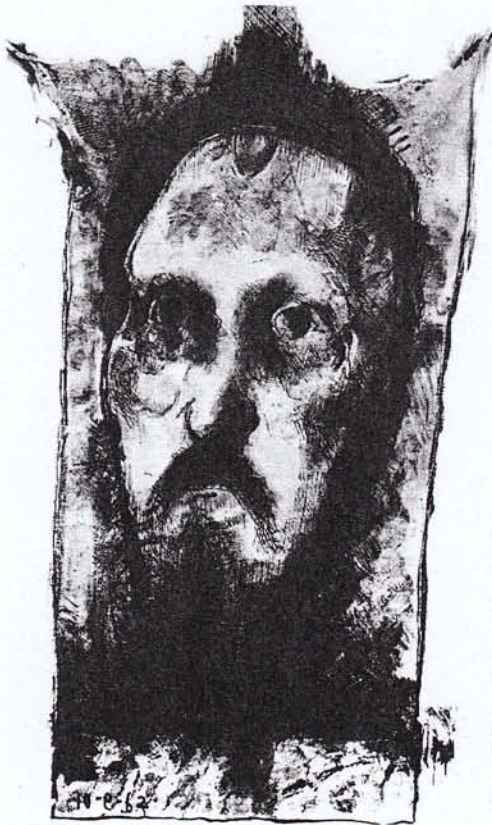
"It is terrible to feel so alienated from one's country," I remarked.

"I don't know what happened with me and my country," Cuevas responded. "Some people don't like western themes, or don't like Coca-Cola. Well, I don't like Mexico. For me, it's a problem of taste. The Mexican people are hypocritical and have a terrible inferiority complex. Never do they talk with truth. They don't have self-criticism."

He suggested reading Oscar Lewis' *Children of Sanchez* (heatedly condemned by most Mexicans) as an example of what he was talking about, or his own autobiography.

"But," he added, reluctantly, "I can't be indifferent to Mexico. I can say I hate Mexico, but it is impossible to say Mexico is not important to me. Mexico for me is like a terrible pain in the head, or a toothache. I think of Mexico always in bad things. The sense of hate for a country in which one is born is like when a son

... a
very insane
country ...



Portrait of Dostoevski

hates the parents. It is not possible to be indifferent to them. It's not easy for me to explain why I hate Mexico; maybe it's in the childhood, like the complex problem of a son.

"When I talk to the Mexican critics, I say always I am not interested in the opinions of the Mexican people, but it is not true. I always want to know the reasons for the criticism. Maybe I am a little provincial because I'm preoccupied with the opinion of my fellow countrymen.

"My primordial preoccupation in life is to die. Sometimes in the midnight, it is not possible for me to sleep because of the terrible preoccupation with death. Maybe I make drawings to push away the idea of death. And to forget this idea, I not only make drawings, I like to travel, to stay in different places, to see movies, a strip tease, I like the jazz. With these things, I forget for some moments the terrible idea of death. When you have a terrible consciousness of death, it is not possible to be the socially conscious man. It is not possible to have a very profound preoccupation with the politics."

Then, with a glimmer of a smile, "I sense the life too in my masochistic idea of the death. Because when you think of death, you sense much more of life."

... terrible
idea of
death ...

By
Terence
Prittie

... the
proudest
pea-hen ...

LONDON: *End of a 'Cordiale' Friendship*

London

The British, like everyone else, have become "anniversary-minded." In the month of May the General Post Office issued a stamp to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament — an event which most Britons have never heard of. Next year, the Battle of Hastings will be celebrated in a manner undreamt of in, say, 1866 or 1766. Britons, who like to align themselves on one side or the other (as in the American Civil War!), will doubtless form a "Harold the Saxon League" and a "Norman Heritage Society," just as they have ganged-up on the side of Charles the Martyr or Cromwell the Reformer.

An event which, however, is passing unnoticed is the 60th birthday of the longest-lasting military alliance which Britain has concluded in her history — the **Entente Cordiale** with France. This alliance had all the trappings of true romance. Phlegmatic, solid John Bull entered into a gallant flirtation with his nearest European neighbour, whom Sir Philip Sidney, Queen Elizabeth the First's nicest favourite, called "that fair enemy, France." The British bulldog, reticent and rheumy-eyed, was officially betrothed to the proudest pea-hen of the continental menagerie.

For five decades, spanning whole lifetimes, Britons believed in the truth of their national romance. A "Napoleon-cult" grew up in Britain, and children who played the game of **L'Attaque** gloried in leading the French Army, with its dashing **Tirailleurs**, capable **Sergents**, moustachioed **Chefs de Brigade**, and oh-so-interesting-looking **Espions**. The French Army conventionally fought the dreary, almost british Britons, and it had to win — if only to avenge the disastrous bad luck of Waterloo! These British children were not, naturally, pro-French of their own volition, but because their elders explained the story of the **Entente Cordiale** to them. The story was a good one: nothing is more satisfying than to know that one's former worst enemies have become one's best friends.

One need not be over-dramatic about the subject, but today the **Entente Cordiale** is dead, and is in process of being indecently buried by General de Gaulle,