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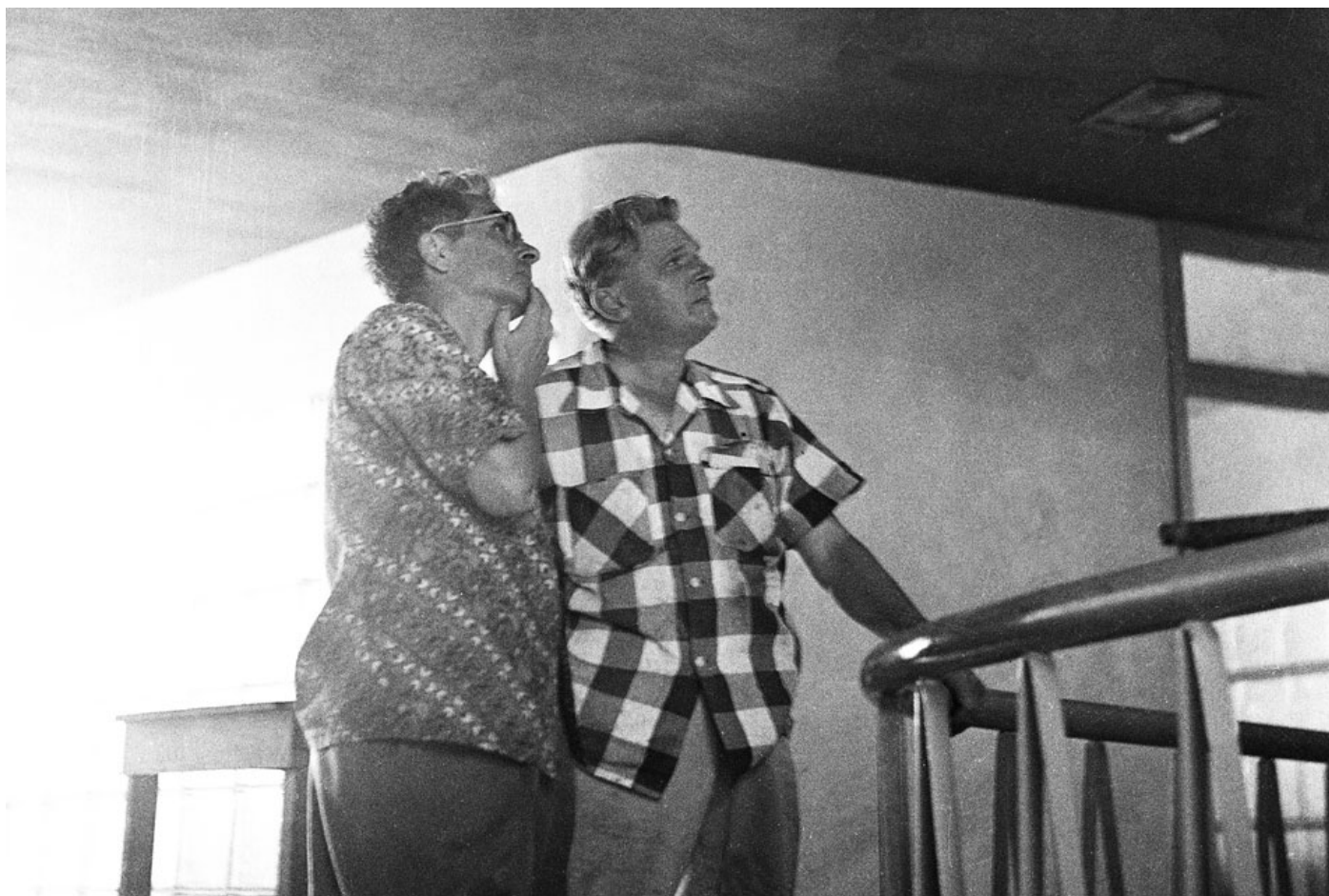
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The Intriguing Story of Muralist Pablo O'Higgins Told in New Book



Jean Charlot and Pablo O'Higgins, Hawaii 1952, photograph by Steve Murin.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA. - *Becoming Pablo O'Higgins* tells the intriguing story of how a blond-haired, blue-eyed Presbyterian from Salt Lake City, Utah, became a celebrated Mexican muralist. Born Paul Higgins in 1904 into a conservative Republican family of Mayflower English and Protestant Scots-Irish ancestry, O'Higgins, at age 20, boldly traveled to Mexico City at a time when Mexico was still reeling from its violent 10-year revolution. He went to see the mural renaissance involving Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and he soon became an assistant to Diego Rivera. O'Higgins worked with Rivera on three of his most important murals and became a life-long friend. Rivera said if he ever had a son, he'd want him to be like O'Higgins.

As a muralist and political graphic artist spreading the ideals of the Mexican Revolution to the masses, O'Higgins was drawn into Mexico's volatile politics. He went into hiding when the Communist Party was made illegal in Mexico as well as after an assassination attempt on Leon Trotsky. He followed to Russia one of the most beautiful and controversial women of the 1920s, photographer, radical, and fugitive Tina Modotti. O'Higgins landed on the U.S. attorney general's blacklist and on a deportation list of the Mexican government during the 1950s. As an Anglo-American from a well-to-do family, he kept a secret his entire life: his father's involvement as an assistant attorney general in the 1915 execution in Utah of miner and labor martyr Joe Hill.

Despite his distancing himself from his boyhood and family in Utah, O'Higgins was influenced by the art education he received there. At East High School he studied with renowned regionalists James T. Harwood and LeConte Stewart, whose influence can be seen in the subject matter of O'Higgins's later art, his technique, and his approach to being an artist. He was also influenced by time he spent as a child in El Cajon, San Diego

County, where his father had a ranch. There, as a young child, he first met Mexican farmworkers and fell in love with the Spanish language and Mexican culture. He returned to San Diego after high school to briefly attend art school.

Besides being a highly respected muralist in Mexico, where he painted more than a dozen murals, O'Higgins is well-known for co-founding the world-famous political graphic arts workshop, Mexico City's Taller de Gráfica Popular, which he formed with Leopoldo Méndez in 1937 to produce art denouncing fascism.

O'Higgins lived in Mexico for all of his adult life, but maintained his U.S. citizenship until 1961, enabling him to work in both the U.S. and Mexico. He developed strong ties to labor on the West Coast during the 1940s: he painted murals for the Ship Scalers Union in Seattle in 1945 and for the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) in Honolulu in 1952. O'Higgins helped Bay Area artists Byron Randall, Victor Arnautoff, and Adelyne Cross Erikson establish a graphic arts workshop in San Francisco in 1947, and he taught at the California Labor School in San Francisco in 1945 and 1949. O'Higgins often said he was born or grew up in San Francisco, likely to distance himself from his family and the Joe Hill case. O'Higgins spent considerable time in Los Angeles as well, where his mother lived in her later years, and, along with Jules Heller and Arnold Mesches, he helped establish the Los Angeles Graphic Arts Workshop in 1947.

When O'Higgins died in 1983, the Mexican government gave him a state funeral in its famed Palacio de Bellas Artes. During his life, and to this day, O'Higgins is an inspiration for artists seeking to create socially-conscious, community-based art. His portrait is included in a mural in Chicano Park, in San Diego County, the largest collection of Chicano murals in the U.S. He appears next to Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Emiliano Zapata, Che Guevara, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. O'Higgins is admired not only for his art but also for his love of Mexico and his determination to bridge the two countries and their cultures through art.

While many books have been published in Spanish praising O'Higgins's art and his love of Mexico, no biographies exist in English. *Becoming Pablo O'Higgins* is the first such book in English and the first critical look at his life published in any language.

Pablo O'Higgins | Muralist | Diego Rivera | José Clemente Orozco |

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