

Article

Mexico, Myth, Politics, Pollock: The Birth of an American Art

Elizabeth L. Langhorne [†]

Art Department, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT 06050-4010, USA; langhornee@ccsu.edu

[†] Retired.

Abstract: Challenging the still widespread modernist and Eurocentric understanding of Pollock's art as a formal advance based in Picasso's cubism, this study explores the pervasive impact of Mexican art, political culture, and myth on the creation of Pollock's *Birth* c. 1941. The recent discovery of Pollock's early exposure to Diego Rivera's use of the Mesoamerican myth of Quetzalcoatl invites a reconsideration of the sources of his art. The myth of Quetzalcoatl challenged Pollock, who responded not just to Rivera but also to Siqueiros' understanding of the political significance of art and to Orozco's call for Quetzalcoatl's return in a modern migration of the spirit at Dartmouth College. Made aware of the positive potential of this mythic symbolism by his Jungian psychotherapy, we see Pollock using it to counter the destructive force of fascism depicted in Picasso's *Guernica* 1937. In the process he discovers his own artistic identity in *Birth* as a mythmaker in a time of war, capable of generating new Pan-American symbols and forms to challenge the hegemony of Picasso.

Keywords: Quetzalcoatl; the plumed serpent; mythmaking; art and politics; Jackson Pollock; Diego Rivera; David Alfaro Siqueiros; José Clemente Orozco; Picasso; American Indian

1. The Challenge of the Myth of the Plumed Serpent

Writing at the time of the magisterial retrospective of Jackson Pollock's art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1998, Robert Storr pointed to the continuing dominance of a Eurocentric modernist approach to understanding Pollock's art. This account—advanced by Lee Krasner, Pollock's wife whom he first met in late 1941, the art critic Clement Greenberg who celebrated his all-over painting, and William Rubin of the Museum of Modern Art who expanded on “Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition” in the pages of *Artforum* in 1967—omitted, he said, the impact of Mexican muralism on the formation of Pollock's art (Storr 1999, pp. 34–39, 51). This omission has been partially rectified by Storr himself and other scholars over the years as they have recognized the impact of David Alfaro Siqueiros' (1896–1974) experimentation with materials on Pollock's adoption of a pouring technique and of José Clemente Orozco's (1883–1949) dynamic treatment of mythological and historical subjects in his murals—whether *Prometheus* 1930, *The Epic of American Civilization* 1932–1934, or the revolutionary and spiritual aspirations of men portrayed in the Guadalajara mural cycles 1936–1939—on Pollock's expressionist paintings of the late 1930s. These corrections to the Pollock story have most recently been dramatized in the large exhibition *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945* at the Whitney Museum of American Art.¹

But striking in *Vida Americana* is the degree to which Orozco's impact on Pollock, while powerful, is presented as negative, a tone first sounded in Kirk Varnedoe's 1998 summary of what Pollock got from Orozco: a “machinery of skeletons, crucifixions, and



Academic Editor: Andrew M. Nedd

Received: 7 December 2024

Revised: 10 January 2025

Accepted: 12 January 2025

Published: 3 March 2025

Citation: Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 2025. Mexico, Myth, Politics, Pollock: The Birth of an American Art. *Arts* 14: 24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts14020024>

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

hallucinatory perspectives” (Varnedoe 1998, p. 26). This tone has echoed throughout the Pollock literature.² Barbara Haskell’s summation in *Vida Americana* of Orozco’s *Epic of American Civilization* as “humanity’s oscillation between ignorance and progress and the pathos of the human condition as embodied in myth” captures the mood of the exhibition’s juxtaposition of, for example, Orozco’s “Gods of the Modern World” (panel 15) (see Figure 13) and Pollock’s *Nude Woman with Skeleton* (c. 1938–1941, The Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, New Hampshire) (Haskell 2020a, p. 36).³ The growing crisis in Pollock’s personal life that led to alcoholism and ultimately psychotherapy in 1939 justifies this juxtaposition.

Here I wish to add to this story by pointing to the positive aspect of Orozco’s *Epic of American Civilization*: the challenge of giving new life to the Mesoamerican myth of Quetzalcoatl, the god of art and civilization symbolized by the plumed serpent. At the end of the myth Quetzalcoatl, betrayed by his people, departs but prophesizes his return. I will argue that Pollock responds to this challenge of return in *Birth*, c. 1941 (Figure 1), drawing on his encounters with the art of all three of the great Mexican muralists, Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros. All were involved with the myth of the plumed serpent, as they responded in their individual ways to the rising threats of capitalism, fascism, and spiritual uncertainty. Pollock’s encounters with the art of Los Tres Grandes, amplified in the context of his Jungian psychotherapy, inform his own use of the myth of the plumed serpent, as he emerges from his personal despair to propose a broadly cultural and artistic challenge to Picasso in *Birth*. This canvas represented Pollock in his debut exhibition *American and French Painting* at the McMillen Gallery in January–February 1942, and contains, as we shall see, the seed of his later abstract expressionist art.



Figure 1. Jackson Pollock, *Birth*, c. 1941. Oil on canvas, 45 × 21in. (116.4 × 55.1 cm). Tate Gallery, London, Purchased 1985. Photo: Art Resource, NY. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

2. Rivera

In an earlier essay, I pointed out that the plumed serpent in the myth of Quetzalcoatl provided inspiration for the imagery of Pollock's *Birth*, identifying the most defined of the three masks bubbling up its vertical axis as an image of the plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl's symbol.⁴ This identification was not broadly accepted.⁵ However, my recent discovery of an image of plumed serpents by Diego Rivera on a 1928 cover of the *Mexican Folkways* magazine that Pollock kept in his library until his death allows me to pick up and broaden the story of the plumed serpent and its importance in Pollock's art.⁶ Rivera's cover (Figure 2) is emblazoned with two feathered serpents, each with forked tongues and rattlesnake tails, rising vertically from the earth to either side of a sun disc just rising over the rolling hills, the initials D. and R. in the bottom corners indicating Diego Rivera as the artist.

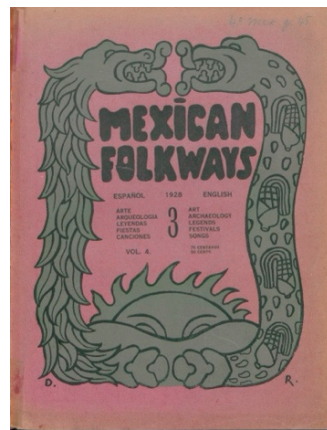


Figure 2. Diego Rivera, *Cover of Mexican Folkways* 4, no. 3, 1928. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Available online: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut. https://digital.iai.spkberlin.de/viewer/image/101265544X/1/LOG_0003/. Accessed on 30 November 2024.

How did Pollock happen to have this cover of *Mexican Folkways*? In a letter to his older brothers Charles and Frank written in October 1929, Jackson reported that he “became acquainted with Rivera’s work through a number of communist meetings I attended after being ousted from school last year”.⁷ When a student at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles, Pollock had become a member of the inner circle around a charismatic and eccentric art teacher, Frederic John de St. Vrain Schwankovsky, a circle that included Philip Guston (then known as Philip Goldstein). For their involvement in a protest against the school’s overemphasis on athletics and the ROTC, they were both expelled in March 1929. Goldstein apparently took Pollock to meetings at the Brooklyn Avenue Jewish Community Center in East Los Angeles. There, “aging Bolsheviks . . . tried to convert the boys to become Communists” with lectures also being given on the Mexican mural movement (Solomon 1987, pp. 42–43). The *Mexican Folkways* cover is evidence of these joint interests at this time: a brush with Marxism and left-leaning politics and an introduction to the art of Rivera.⁸

By 1928 Diego Rivera was the best-known painter of the Mexican Mural Renaissance that served the post-revolutionary Mexican government’s effort to unify the nation after the 1910–1920 revolution, drawing the indigenous and Hispanic populations into a new mestizo Mexican whole. Rivera had been in Paris, absorbing the new modernist style, when he was called home in July 1921 by Vasconcelos, Minister of Education, to create murals on the walls of public buildings. Many of the artists Vasconcelos hired were communists who had fought in the revolution. Rivera joined the Communist Party in 1922 and helped form the Syndicate of Mexican Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors. Between 1923 and 1928 he created mural cycles for the National Preparatory School, the Ministry of

Public Education in Mexico City, and the National School of Agriculture in Chapingo. In 1926 he accepted the invitation from Frances Toors, an American anthropologist and editor of a small bilingual magazine published in Mexico City called *Mexican Folkways*, which she had founded in 1925, to become the magazine's art director. Its purpose was to inform readers about Mexico's "art, archaeology, legends, festivals, songs" as stated on the cover, a purpose that aligned itself with the goals of the rapidly emerging mural movement and the social reforms that the post-revolutionary government sought to effect by addressing and integrating the indigenous Indian population, their past and continuing culture (Schuessler 2020).

Rivera's first cover for the June–July 1926 issue, making his Communist sympathies known, was a drawing of two workers, one holding a hammer, the other a sickle, to either side of a coiled feathered serpent, biting its tail.⁹ The next four issues (4, no. 1–4) had the cover image that Pollock kept: the two rising feathered serpents. Here, Rivera refers to depictions of the plumed serpent in postconquest codices or in ancient sculptures being unearthed by Manuel Gamio, anthropologist and chief ideologue of *indigenismo*, working at Teotihuacan, a city of the great Toltec civilization, later taken over by the Aztecs, located just outside present-day Mexico City (Coffey 2020, p. 96; Gamio 1922). The Toltec culture was presided over by the worship of Quetzalcoatl, whose name literally means "plumed serpent", the god of wind and rain and bringer of civilization. Rivera's use of the plumed serpent image not only reflects *indigenismo* but is also tinged with a mystical hermeticism, as he used the image of a coiled plumed serpent to create a coat of arms in 1923 for a new Rosicrucian lodge in Mexico City, named Quetzalcoatl.¹⁰ He, Gamio, and Calles were all members. Calles was to become the "Jefe Máximo" of Mexican politics between 1928 and 1934, and was to eliminate government mural commissions for all but Rivera. In 1929 Calles commissioned from Rivera the massive mural cycle, *The Epic of the Mexican People*, at the National Palace, where Rivera presented the myth of Quetzalcoatl in the first mural, "The Ancient Indian World" completed in October 1930, the full study for which Pollock would encounter in 1931 in New York City (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3. Diego Rivera, *The Epic of the Mexican People: "The Ancient Indian World"* (Stairwell, North Wall), 1929–1930. National Palace, Mexico City. Photo: Bob Schalkwijk. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

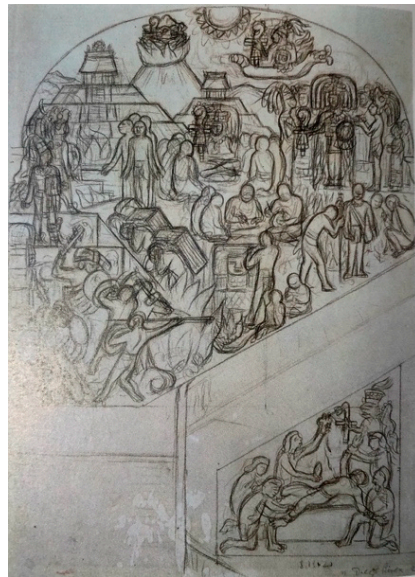


Figure 4. Diego Rivera, Study for fresco in the National Palace, Mexico, 1925. Pencil with color, 21 × 14 in. (53 × 36 cm). Technological Museum of the Federal Electricity Commission, Mexico. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In both, the main elements of the myth are clear: at the top left, Quetzalcoatl emerges as creator deity from a flaming volcano in his guise as a feathered serpent with bifurcated tongue; in the center, he is shown in his human incarnation as a semidivine priest-king and ruler of Tula; on the top right, he announces his departure riding on the back of a plumed serpent with forked tongue, prophesying his return. The question is: how will Quetzalcoatl return? Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and Pollock will provide different answers.

In the June–July 1926 issue of *Mexican Folkways* Rivera used the image of the plumed serpent in a “cartoon” to present his social political position: the serpent moving across the page under a full shining sun, from two indigenous figures on the right, a peasant woman bearing a basket of fruits on her head and a revolutionary man with a gun, towards the left, attacking a white-skinned capitalist holding a briefcase accompanied by a little devil (D. Rivera 1926, pp. 24–25). The communist anti-capitalist message was clear and amplified by reproductions from Rivera’s contemporary work on the Chapingo murals: *The Earth Enslaved, Man Enslaved Before the Revolution, After the Revolution, The Division of Land*. In his October 1929 letter Pollock said he had found an article by Rivera that Charles had recommended to him the previous summer, “The Revolution in Painting”, in which Rivera described the artist as a worker among other workers, giving the proletariat “an epic form of art to aid its organization and express its struggle in social reconstruction” (D. Rivera 1929, p. xxx). Pollock declared “I certainly admire his work”. He also reported that, having been expelled from school a second time, “I have thought of going to Mexico City if there is any means of making a livelihood there”. (Pollock and Family 2011, p. 16). Clearly Mexico and its art had caught his imagination. Tony Smith, with whom Pollock would become close in 1948, remarked: “he would allude to Mexico and the Southwest with a knowledge, which struck me as being romantic as he obviously thought life in those areas was more authentic than life is here [the East]”.¹¹

In the October 1929 letter, even as he stated that he hoped to become “An Artist of some kind”, he mentioned his interest in “religion”, saying that he had dropped it for the present. But, should he “follow the Occult Mysticism, it wouldn’t be for commercial reasons”. Here he referred to a trip to Ojai, just outside of Los Angeles, with Schwankovsky and Guston, to attend for a week the camp meetings of Krishnamurti, Theosophical savior and yogi

and friend of Schwankovsky.¹² Schwankovsky had explored Hinduism, Buddhism, and Rosicrucianism, before settling on Theosophy in 1928 (Fort 2000). When Schwankovsky invited Krishnamurti out to his summer studio in Laguna Beach to talk to his students about yoga, a discipline in which the rising of bodily and psychic energy upward is likened to the rise of a serpent, Tolegian, another member of Schwankovsky's inner circle, remembers that "Jackson was fascinated".¹³

In a second January 1930 letter to Charles, Pollock reported that he had gotten back into school on a part-time basis and that he was "still interested in theosophy" and studying *Light on the Path*.¹⁴ This theosophical treatise by Mabel Collins is laced with such advice as "the would be occultist" must "dare to take the snake of self in a steady grasp and conquer it, so becoming divine" (Collins 1913, pp. 33, 50). I mention Pollock's involvement with theosophy and yoga to suggest that he kept the *Mexican Folkways* image of the rising serpents, not just because it was by Rivera or associated with communist ambitions for society but because it was suggestive of the mystical force of rising energy that had attracted Rivera as a Rosicrucian and himself as a young man looking for guidance in life.¹⁵

Charles, himself an artist in New York, was sufficiently worried about his younger brother and his continuing interest in Occult Mysticism that he drove out to Los Angeles in June 1930 and took him to Pomona College to see the recently completed mural by Orozco, *Prometheus* (Figure 5). Jackson with Guston had already visited Pomona to see Orozco working on the mural (Ashton 1990, p. 26). This image of the upward striving Titan of Greek myth, who reaches to steal fire from the gods in order to bring this civilizing gift to the human masses below, is flanked on the side panels, on the left by the old gods whom he defies, on the right by centaurs, the bottom one being dragged down by giant serpents. *Prometheus* remained for Pollock, even in later life, "the greatest painting done in modern times".¹⁶ Convinced now to follow the path of art, he accompanied Charles back to New York City, to become in September 1930, like his brother, a student of the American Regionalist muralist, Thomas Hart Benton.



Figure 5. José Clemente Orozco, *Prometheus*, 1930. Fresco mural, Central panel 20 × 28.5 ft. (609.6 × 868.68 cm), West panel (Zeus, Hera, and Io) 15.5 × 7 ft. (472.44 × 213.36 cm), East panel (Centaur) 15.5 × 7 ft. (472.44 × 213.36 cm). Pomona College, Claremont, CA. Photo: Schenck and Schenck. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

Once in New York at the grand retrospective of Rivera's work held at the Museum of Modern Art from 22 December 1931 to 27 January 1932, Pollock would have encountered the plumed serpent as part of the myth of Quetzalcoatl. Rivera, already famous as a modern artist inspired by the Pre-Columbian past, was the subject of MOMA's second monographic exhibition. There, the study drawing c. 1925 (see Figure 5) for Rivera's recently completed "The Ancient Indian World" mural at the National Palace was on display.¹⁷ Perhaps more startling, if Pollock happened to see it, was the pink cover of a *Coloring Book* of illustrations by Rivera published in English in 1931 (Figure 6) around the time of the retrospective: the same image of the two rising serpents used by Rivera for four of the *Mexican Folkways* covers, of which he owned one ([Artimorean Art and Media \[1931\] 2019](#)).

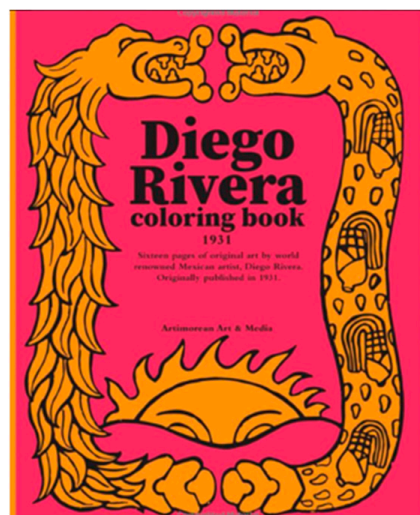


Figure 6. Artimorean Art and Media, Diego Rivera Coloring Book 1931: Sixteen pages of original art by world renowned Mexican artist, Diego Rivera. Originally published in 1931, ed. Eric King, Craig Trahan. Austin, Texas: Artimorean Art and Media, 2019. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

As his friend Harold Lehman has commented, for Pollock in the early 1930s "Modern art . . . was Diego Rivera".¹⁸ Expelled from the Communist party in 1929 for, among other things, accepting the commission for the National Palace from the liberal bourgeois Calles and then also producing a mural cycle for the Palace of Cortez in Cuernavaca commissioned by the American Ambassador Morrow, Rivera had gone on to accept a series of commissions from capitalists and civic institutions in the United States between 1931 and 1933. Pollock watched Rivera painting the *Man at the Crossroads* mural at Rockefeller Center before Rivera's introduction of a tribute to Lenin precipitated its destruction. He then watched Rivera painting *Portrait of America*, a history in murals of workers in America, at the New Workers' School in 1933.¹⁹

After this Rivera returned to Mexico to finish the murals at the National Palace. Back in Mexico, after the 1933 debacle of the Rockefeller destruction of Rivera's mural for Rockefeller Center, Rivera would reassert his allegiance to the Communist Party by depicting in the final mural at the National Palace, finished by November 1935, the messianic return of Quetzalcoatl in the guise of Karl Marx (Figure 7).²⁰



Figure 7. Diego Rivera, *The Epic of the Mexican People*: “Mexico Today and Tomorrow” detail (Stairwell, North Wall), 1934. National Palace, Mexico City. Photo: Bob Schalkwijk. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./ Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

This particular conclusion to the Quetzalcoatl mythologem culminates Rivera’s story of national historical progress in sympathy with the international left and its hopes for the success of Marxist Communism in a modernizing industrial society. If one tracks Pollock’s political awareness in the mid-1930s, while he may not have known of the political denouement of Rivera’s handling of the Quetzalcoatl myth at the National Palace, he was certainly aware of the enmity between Rivera and Siqueiros.

3. Siqueiros

Even more than Rivera, it was Siqueiros who instilled in Pollock a sense of the social responsibility of the artist. Pollock knew of Siqueiros’ highly political posture as an artist, as well as his innovative techniques. Both his brother Sande Pollock, who was still in Los Angeles, and his good friend Reuben Kadish, as well as his old teacher Schwankowsky, helped Siqueiros install his very controversial mural *Tropical America* (Figure 8) at the Plaza Art Center in Los Angeles in 1932.²¹



Figure 8. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *América Tropical: Oprimida y Destrozada por los Imperialismos*; *Tropical America oppressed and destroyed by imperialisms* 1932 (1932 photograph), fresco, $19\frac{3}{4} \times 98\frac{3}{8}$ ft. (50.165 × 249.872 cm). Los Angeles, California. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

Instead of the expected tropical scene, the full title was *Tropical America oppressed and destroyed by imperialisms*, Siqueiros depicted in front of a Mayan-style pyramid an Indian peon crucified on a large central cross topped by a screaming eagle, symbol of American capitalism and imperialism. On the right, he depicted guerilla soldiers, on the far left, an

array of plumed serpent and snake and bird symbols. Furthest left is a tall incomplete *kukulcan* column, symbol of the Mayan plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl, lacking its serpent head, partially obscured by barren and menacing ceiba trees. In the trees are a snake in the lower ground and an eagle almost hidden in the upper branches, an allusion to the foundation myth of the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan. Since these images also appear on the Mexican flag, they symbolize here the continuity of conquest (Zamora 2014, pp. 218–19). *Tropical America* is, thus, a call for revolution against imperialism and capitalism. This fight Siqueiros kept in the forefront of his art and behavior, soon to engage Pollock in New York in 1935–1936.

Precisely because Rivera had accepted the commission for the National Palace from the liberal bourgeois Calles and gone on to accept commissions from capitalists in the United States, Siqueiros as an adamant communist charged Rivera with opportunism in the pages of the May 1934 *New Masses*, an American Marxist magazine closely associated with the Communist Party. There, in an article entitled “Rivera’s Counter-Revolutionary Road”, Siqueiros vilified Rivera as “saboteur of collective work”, an “aesthete of Imperialism” (Siqueiros 1934, pp. 16–17). The enmity between the two exploded in 1935 in Mexico City, when Rivera entered a conference on Progressive Education waving a revolver in protest of Siqueiros’ remarks. This precipitated a verbal duel attended by riotous crowds, the whole incident reported in *Time Magazine* in October 1935. This incident then received treatment in the December 1935 *New Masses* in the article “Battle of the Century” (Eisenberg 1935). Pollock’s interest in the arguments as to what constitutes revolutionary art responding to social reality and revolutionary struggle is indicated by his keeping in his library clippings from the 1 October 1935, *New Masses*, an issue that contained a special Art Section dedicated to “Revolutionary Art Today” (O’Connor and Thaw 1978, vol. 4, p. 197).

When Siqueiros actually came to New York City to lead the Mexican delegation at the American Artists’ Congress, convened by the Popular branch of the Communist Party in New York in February 1936 to fight war and fascism, Jackson became caught up in the intense political environment at a personal level. His earlier brush with Communism blossomed. All three—Jackson, Sande and their friend Lehman, also a Schwankovsky student who had also earlier worked with Siqueiros in Los Angeles—attended the Congress.²² There, Siqueiros denounced Rivera’s muralism for rich clients in secluded spaces, arguing against fresco murals in favor of graphics and more modern, including industrial, artistic techniques and materials, as more effective tools in reaching the masses.²³ As Lehman noted, Pollock was, by early 1936, drawn into Siqueiros’s orbit.²⁴

Enthused by Siqueiros at the American Artists’ Congress, Lehman, Sande and Jackson all participated in Siqueiros’s New York Experimental Workshop in April 1936, exploring innovative means in art to reach the public (Figure 9).



Figure 9. George Cox (left), David Alfaro Siqueiros (center) and Jackson Pollock (right) outside the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop, New York, 1936. Courtesy of the Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Pollock was intrigued with the experiments with controlled accidents and unconventional materials and techniques. These would become important, as is now widely recognized in his later aesthetic development.²⁵ Here, it is interesting to note the intensity and closeness of this leftist cell in which Pollock moved. Robert Motherwell later, around 1942, remarked on Pollock's "very leftist political views that seemingly had little to do with his art".²⁶ It is likely that these leftist views were solidified in 1936. With Lehman who was in charge of floats at the Experimental Workshop, Jackson and Sande with others created for the Communist party May Day parade floats with anti-capitalist puppetry. Jackson worked on a wooden armature of an allegorical float, which workshop historian Laurance Hurlburt has described in detail:

"The Workshop's embodiment of Wall Street capitalism shows the figure's head topped with a swastika and holding in his outstretched hands emblems of the Republican and Democratic parties (thus symbolizing Wall Street control over the U.S. political system). A gigantic moving hammer adorned with the Communist hammer and sickle, which represented the unity of the North American people, smashed into oblivion a Wall Street tickertape machine, spewing the tape blood-like over the capitalist figure". (Hurlburt 1989, p. 226)

In light of Pollock's own later canvas titled *Birth*, it is interesting to note that Siqueiros produced, that summer, a provocative easel painting using his new experimental techniques entitled *Birth of Fascism*. There, a woman on a raft in a stormy sea gives birth to Fascist leaders, Hitler, Mussolini and the capitalist Hearst, their heads just visible, as the Statue of Liberty begins to sink below the waves (Hurlburt 1989, p. 224).²⁷ Jackson, in his May 1936 letter to his mother, remarked "there can be no doubt about fascism in America".²⁸ After the June convention of the Communist Party for which the workshop created twelve-foot-high portraits of the two candidates, Sande wrote his mother that their acceptance speech was "by far, the most tremendous moment in my life".²⁹ Lehman even helped Siqueiros write a speech delivered at the American Artists Union urging more artists to join the workshop (Lehman 1997). When, in December 1936, Siqueiros closed the workshop and left to actually fight fascism in Spain, becoming the head of a graphic division, he addressed his farewell letter to "Comrades: Pollock, Sandy, and Lehman", signing it "Always your comrade, A. Siqueiros".³⁰

4. Orozco and the Myth of Quetzalcoatl

Pollock's most straight-forward and challenging encounter with the myth of Quetzalcoatl would be his viewing of Orozco's 1932–1934 *Epic of American Civilization* mural at Dartmouth College, an epic in which Quetzalcoatl plays a central role. In late 1936 he drove up to New Hampshire with his brother Sande, Guston, and two other friends, Reginald Wilson and Bernie Steffen.³¹ Guston was an excellent companion for this trip. Not only had he seen Orozco's *Prometheus* mural with Pollock but he was also very aware of Mexico and the myth of Quetzalcoatl. With Reuben Kadish he had recently finished painting a giant mural in Morelia, Mexico, variously known as *The Workers Struggle for Liberty*, *The Struggle Against War and Fascism* or *The Struggle Against Terrorism*, August 1934–January 1935.³² In an impressive achievement for young artists, they had covered 1024 square feet of walls in the old summer palace of the Emperor Maximilian in Morelia. Using large-scale figures, they symbolized the forces of repression during the Spanish Inquisition and, at the hands of the contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Nazism, the forces of Communism coming to the rescue in the distance. They had gotten this commission through Kadish's collaboration with Siqueiros when he was working in Los Angeles in 1932. Now, in mid-October 1936, flush with the success of the Morelia mural and of the Duarte murals completed in July in

California for the new Federal Art Project, Guston arrived in New York to camp out for some three and a half months on the floor of Jackson and Sande's studio and to talk of art.³³

Even before his time in Mexico, Guston was familiar with Mayan and Aztec myths as he had had the task of researching them in early 1934 when he served as an assistant to the muralist Leo Katz in Los Angeles, along with Kadish and Harold Lehman (Lehman 1997). Once Guston and Kadish were in Mexico, they visited the great Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan, also known as the Temple of the Feathered Serpent (Figure 10), bristling with large sculpted heads of plumed serpents, fanged and with pronounced scrolling motifs behind the eyes, encircled with feathered plumes. They also saw Rivera's murals in Mexico City, probably including *The Epic of the Mexican People* being completed at the National Palace, where its first panel "The Ancient Indian World" had been finished in 1930.³⁴

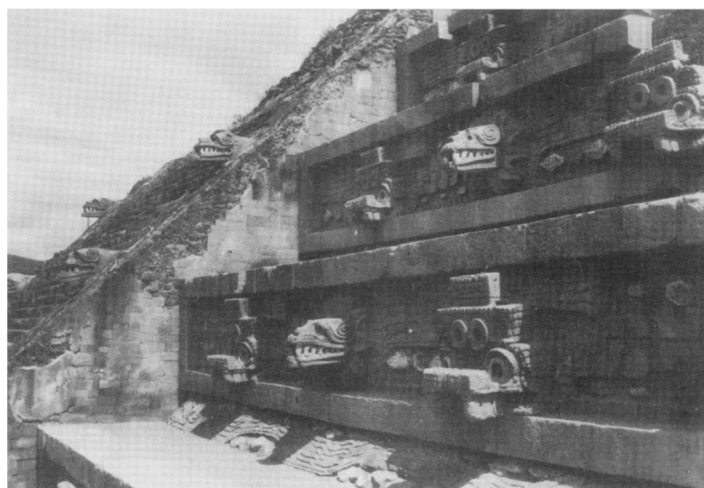


Figure 10. Temple of Quetzalcoatl (Temple of the Feathered Serpent), Teotihuacan, Mexico. As published in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940), 39. Photo: Digital Image. © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

In late 1936, when Guston arrived in New York and bunked in Sande and Jackson Pollock's loft, topics of conversation undoubtedly were wide-ranging: the use of art to fight war and fascism, experimental ways of making art, the murals of Rivera, the great Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Such topics would have been fresh in their minds when they drove up to Dartmouth to see Orozco's murals.

Orozco's sweeping mural cycle *The Epic of American Civilization* 1932–1934 is located in the Baker Library at Dartmouth (Figure 11). Orozco divided the mural into two chronological sequences: the first depicts the Pre-Columbian world from the ancient migration of Indigenous people through the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice followed by a representation of Aztec warriors to the arrival of the deity Quetzalcoatl who brings about a Golden Age of arts, crafts, and civilization. When finally rejected by his people, Quetzalcoatl departs on a raft of fierce serpents, his arm pointing dramatically to the next panel "The Prophecy"—here of a return presented as a European invasion. The second half of the epic depicts Cortez, mistaken by the Aztecs for the returning Quetzalcoatl, and the Spanish conquest, followed by new diversity and complexity in the civilization on the American continent, the machinery of industrial development, an Anglo-American educated but conformist culture, and a Hispano-American dynamic but corrupt culture leading to revolution, ending in a satirical denunciation of modern institutional education in "Gods of the Modern World". This denunciation is followed by symbols of nationalism and a glorification of the dead soldier, then the challenge of a modern migration of the spirit.³⁵



Figure 11. José Clemente Orozco. *The Epic of American Civilization* 1932–1934. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College. Photo: Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

Confronted with this panorama, Guston would have recognized in the panel dedicated to Quetzalcoatl's arrival, the "Coming of Quetzalcoatl", the setting of the mighty Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, built in the same ceremonial complex as the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Pollock, naturally, would have been attracted to the panel just to the left, "Aztec Warriors", with its image of a monumental sculpted head of a fanged plumed serpent. As revealed in a sketchbook page *JPCR* 477r (Figure 12) he was especially drawn to "Gods of the Modern World" (Figure 13). There, an academically gowned skeleton acts as midwife to a skeleton prostate on a bed of books; the fetus is already a skeleton, already wearing a mortar board. Barbara Haskell and Pollock scholars have emphasized the impact of this panel with its skeletal imagery and topic of birth on Pollock's *Bald Woman with Skeleton*, c. 1938–1941.³⁶ Lisa Mintz Messinger points out that Pollock actually copied details of this panel on the sketchbook page *JPCR* 477r, replicating Orozco's figure of the newborn skeleton. She also notes the presence of "the massive brown cross [which] plays a starring role in another mural panel, titled 'Modern Migration of the Spirit'" (Figure 14) (Messinger 2012, p. 45).



Figure 12. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled, JPCR 477r*, c. 1938–1939 (36.2 × 25.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné Archives, Pollock-Krasner Study Center. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 13. José Clemente Orozco, *The Epic of American Civilization: “Gods of the Modern World”* (Panel 15), 1932–1934. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College. Photo: Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.



Figure 14. José Clemente Orozco, *The Epic of American Civilization: “Modern Migration of the Spirit”* (Panel 21), 1932–1934. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College; Photo: Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

The “Modern Migration of the Spirit” panel was, we shall see, also very important to Pollock. In his sketchbook image, Pollock moves from the skeletal themes of “Gods of the Modern World” to the large brown cross of the “Modern Migration of the Spirit”, a panel that poses the question of a spiritual renewal as a possible answer to the prophecy of Quetzalcoatl’s return.³⁷ A Christ figure, bearing the wounds of his crucifixion, sheds his old skin as he emerges a defiant hero who destroys the symbols of other religions and even cuts down his own cross. A fiery yellow and orange-red color, he stands as a Promethean man, the archetypal hero-martyr who aims to bring about humankind’s enlightenment.³⁸ Friends recall that Pollock in the mid-1930s kept a reproduction of Orozco’s *Prometheus* prominently displayed in his studio.³⁹ At Dartmouth, the Promethean challenge and myth of Quetzalcoatl are intermingled, the challenge now given the specific character of a myth, but a myth of return that does not yet have an answer.

Orozco himself in a press release of 1932 at the beginning of his Dartmouth project articulated the challenge. “The American continental races are now becoming aware of their own personality, as it emerges from two cultural currents—the indigenous and the European. The great American myth of Quetzalcoatl is a living one embracing both elements and pointing clearly, by its prophetic nature, to the responsibility shared equally by the two Americas of creating here an authentic New World civilization”.⁴⁰ At the completion of his project in 1934, Orozco reiterated by capitalization what building on

both indigenous and European colonial cultures generates: an “AMERICAN idea”.⁴¹ Of course Pollock himself was in 1936 in no position to realize this idea, to meet the challenge of the myth of Quetzalcoatl and his return. Nor was he temperamentally attracted to the supplemental panels that Orozco provided, not a part of the original commission: “Modern Industrial Man” depicting the construction of modern buildings and a young laborer reading, doing the intellectual labor needed to create the new industrial culture.

That summer, Sande married and Guston was to marry in February 1937, both events aggravating Pollock’s own self-doubts and difficulties with women, especially with his mother.⁴² *JPCR 477r*, the sketchbook drawing that Messinger notes, reflects some of his growing negative feelings. The image of the skeletal fetus and the snake in the womb can be understood, in part, in terms of Jackson’s fantasies about his own birth as a blue baby, the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, nearly strangled at birth.⁴³ In the foreground of the drawing, a large skeletal figure kneels at the feet of two fleshy legs from which springs the large brown cross, which dominates the scene, figuring the theme of death and suffering. Nor was his artmaking with his teacher Thomas Hart Benton a solace. Although Benton admired the work of the Mexican muralists, saying “The Mexican concern with publicly significant meanings and with the pageant of Mexican national life corresponded perfectly with what I had in mind for art in the U.S”, “the scenes, behaviours and mythologies of American life” which he chose to paint, typical scenes in the daily life of working men and women across America, were ill-suited to Pollock’s passionate and troubled temperament (Benton 1969, pp. 61, 66). In the spring of 1938, when Pollock requested a leave of absence from the Federal Art Project of the Works Project Administration, a Roosevelt New Deal program of which he had been a part since August 1935, to go on a sketching trip with Benton, he was terminated instead for “continued absence”. That June, at his own request, he entered the Westchester Division of New York Hospital, known as Bloomingdale’s, for treatment of acute alcoholism. This lasted through September 1938.

During the tumultuous period of 1938–1939 Pollock turned increasingly to imagery inspired by Orozco’s art, whether at Dartmouth or Guadalajara. The negative image of *JPCR 477r* dates from this time, as do increasingly aspirational images.⁴⁴ For example, the drama of Orozco’s *Man of Fire* from the Baroque dome of the chapel of Hospicios de Cabanas at Guadalajara fed Pollock’s hopeful imagery in two painted ceramic bowls, “*The Flight of Man*” (c. 1939; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and an untitled one, *JPCR 925*, which Pollock described as telling “the story of my life” (c. 1939), showing, in the first, the upward flight of a man in radical perspective and, in the second, a baby cupped in Promethean flames.⁴⁵ While such imagery is aspirational, Pollock in 1938 had no path forward. In early 1939, still drinking and depressed, he had another breakdown. This breakdown led to psychotherapy in 1939–1940 with Dr. Joseph Henderson, a Jungian therapist, who helped him find his way.

5. Dr. Henderson and Snakes

In the eighty-three drawings that Pollock brought in with him to his therapy sessions, seventeen have in them images of snakes in a wide array of treatment. As a medical student Dr. Henderson had himself been obsessed with Indian art and rituals, including those with snakes. He visited the Zuni and Sia tribes to see the corn dances, and the Hopis to see the famous snake initiation rite (Hill 1978).⁴⁶ In the Hopi rites priests handle snakes as part of their yearly invocation of harmony with nature, their ancestors, and a call for rain needed to grow corn. Pollock too had read in the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology volumes that he had collected in the early 1930s detailed descriptions of the Hopi and Sia snake ceremonies.⁴⁷ But his preoccupation with snakes at this juncture was driven less by American Indian ceremonial practice than by his personal suffering and

needs.⁴⁸ In *JPCR* 531 (Figure 15), for example, one of the drawings Pollock brought into Henderson, a central triangular being, flanked by wooden horses, strikes down with its arrow towards a humanoid figure lying below, completely engulfed by a coiling serpent. On the other hand, in *JPCR* 527 (Figure 16) Henderson observed “a snakelike movement” up the spine of a figure, skeletal up to its top which then transforms into a fleshed-out three-dimensional head.



Figure 15. Jackson Pollock, Untitled, *JPCR* 531 c. 1939–1940, colored pencil, crayon, ink, ink wash, 14 × 11 in. (35.5 × 27.9 cm). Photo: Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné Archives, Pollock Krasner Study Center. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

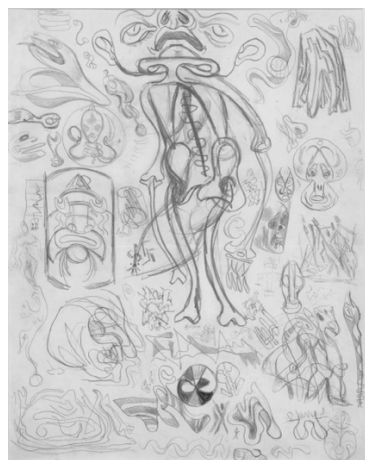


Figure 16. Jackson Pollock, Untitled, *JPCR* 527 c. 1939–1940, pencil and colored pencil on paper, 14 × 11 in. (35.5 × 27.9 cm). Collection of Phyllis and David Adelson. Photo: Courtesy of Phyllis and David Adelson. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Pollock’s imagery intrigued Henderson, who recalled “Most of my comments centered around the nature of the archetypal symbolism in his drawings”.⁴⁹ In Jungian psychology archetypes are said to represent universal patterns and images that are part of humanity’s collective unconscious that gain a conscious form in myth and religion. But, according to Jung, the excessive rationality of modern man made it necessary to discover new living symbols, whether for individuals or society at large. In 1933 he wrote of this dilemma in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* and, with greater urgency, he spoke of it in his 1938 Yale lectures, published as *Psychology and Religion* (see Jung 1934, pp. 191, 195–98; 1938, pp. 6–7, 58–59). He concluded that it was up to certain extraordinary individuals, such as yogis and artists, to open doors to the unconscious, to activate the primordial images and the flow of

living archetypal symbols.⁵⁰ Seeing Pollock's images Henderson admits he was brought "strongly into a state of countertransference".⁵¹

Henderson had used the imagery of snakes and a plumed serpent in a drawing of a mandala he made in 1931 (Figure 17) when, after some months of analysis with Jung in Zurich, he was deciding if he should become a doctor.⁵² The story that unfolds in the mandala, which he also referred to as an initiation drawing when he described it to a friend in 2006, is "of a snake's transformation" within the psyche's libido. At the bottom of the central vertical axis of the mandala he drew a rising snake, at its top an eagle with outstretched wings. At the lower left of the mandala, the snake is at rest; at the lower right, the snake is agitated; in the upper right, the snake moves "out of itself into a new spiritual place and takes on the form of a plumed serpent". In the upper left, a plant symbolized his decision to become a doctor. His description of the drawing makes it clear that he was also aware of the relationship of his imagery to Mayan and Aztec mythology. In addition to depicting Aztec figures to the left and right of the mandala, he identified the black circle around the light core in the center of the mandala as the black obsidian mirror of Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec god of war. "Looking into the black obsidian mirror symbolizes the ability to focus on the inner life". (see [Singer 2006](#), pp. 10–12). In later years, Henderson hung this drawing in his office. Perhaps it hung in his office when Pollock visited once every week; perhaps it was even a topic of conversation. Given his own involvement with serpent and plumed serpent imagery at a crucial juncture in his own life, it was no wonder that he was intrigued with Pollock's imagery as it was to unfold.

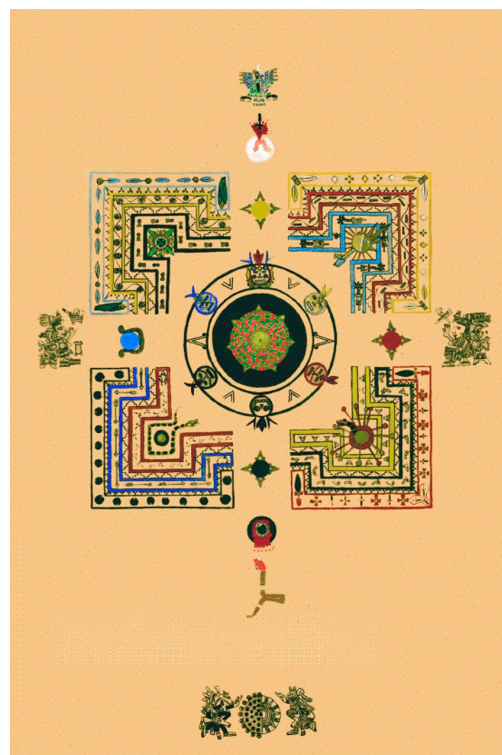


Figure 17. Joseph Henderson, *An Initiatory Drawing*, 1931. Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, New York, NY. Photo: Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. © ARAS, NY.

At one point he encouraged Pollock to pursue Jungian archetypal imagery, even showing Pollock a mandala in a book for which Jung had written a commentary, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* ([Wilhelm 1975](#)), explaining to him that mandalas were images of integration (Figure 18).⁵³

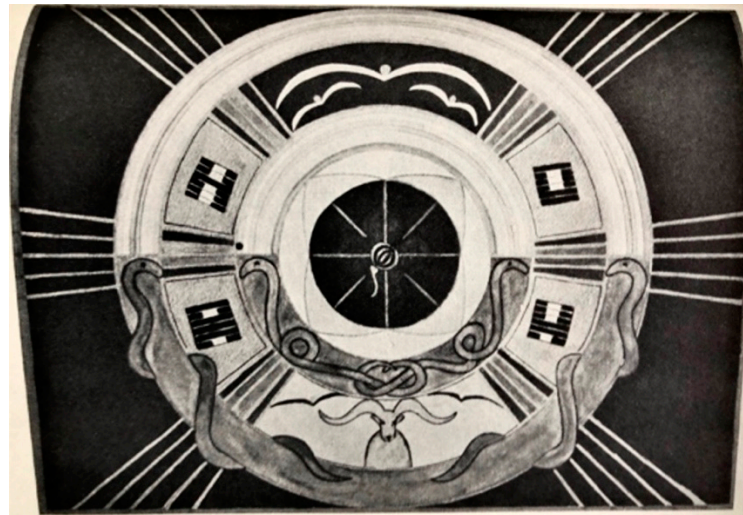


Figure 18. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, trans. Richard Wilhelm, commentary by C.G. Jung. London 1931. Plate 4.

In this particular mandala, opposites were presented as coiling serpents and birds in flight, the same opposites found in his own 1931 “initiation drawing”. But, in response to the idea of creating mandalas, Pollock was adamant that he would rather challenge Picasso. “He fought me tooth and nail”.⁵⁴ In the end, Henderson reacted to Pollock’s drawings as examples of his progress as a painter: “I felt this to be his most reliable form of identity and I encouraged him to develop this talent”.⁵⁵ He treated Pollock not as a sick individual “but as an artist in the process of finding his career. The treatment, therefore, was vocational rather than therapeutic” (Henderson 1982, p. 85). Later in life Pollock would say to Lee Krasner how important Henderson was to him.⁵⁶ Pollock’s 1956 statement that he had “been a Jungian for a long time”, suggests that, due to his Jungian psychotherapy, he embraced the Jungian notion of a collective unconscious underpinning both ancient Indian symbols and the emergence of his own plumed serpent imagery, which he probably, by now, thought of as archetypal, as he proceeded to generate a new and living symbol for himself and society at large.⁵⁷ Such conviction is an extension of his youthful attraction to mysticism, theosophy, and yoga, but also in keeping with his long-held belief that art should have not only a private but public, even political, significance.⁵⁸

6. *Guernica* and the Plumed Serpent

As Pollock was working his way through personal trauma, the public trauma of the rise of fascism evident in the bombing of *Guernica*, memorialized by Picasso in his mural *Guernica*, 1937 (Figure 19), was presented to the New York public. *Guernica*, with its horse and bull imagery, and related preparatory drawings were displayed, under the sponsorship of the anti-fascist American Artists Congress, at the Valentine Gallery in early 1939. Later, when Jackson and Lee Krasner, his girlfriend whom he met in late 1941, discussed *Guernica*, which they both admired, Lee distinguished the formal from the moral and psychological properties, which she dismissed. Jackson refused to separate the two.⁵⁹ “Moral” suggests a judgment of right and wrong in human behavior. Certainly Pollock agreed with Picasso’s cry out against this infamous event in the Spanish Civil War, the fascist aerial bombing of a Spanish civilian population on a market day. But his reactions to Picasso’s animal vocabulary of bull and horse, rooted in the Spanish bullfight and the Mediterranean minotaur myth, suggest a moral critique. In this he was encouraged by the Jungian convictions of Dr. Henderson. As revealed in papers on *The Psychological Aspects of the War* at a December 1939 meeting of the Analytical Psychology Club of New York, which

Henderson attended, Jungians proposed that an individual through introversion might tap the collective unconscious, thereby releasing a new redeeming hero principle much needed in modern society (see [Harding 1940](#), pp. 22–23). Introversion, they held, could have social consequences. Henderson, however, found Picasso's imagery suspect.



Figure 19. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 137.4 in. × 305.5 in. (350 × 782 cm). Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. Photo Credit: John Bigelow Taylor/ Art Resource, NY. © 2025 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

In an article titled “Minotaur” (March 1940), written in response to a *Picasso Postscript Exhibition* held at the Buchholz Gallery, Henderson criticized Picasso's minotaur image of a man with a bull's head, associated with the bull in *Guernica*, seeing in “this ancient symbol of the blind impetuosity of man's emotional life . . . an overwhelming obstacle to true intellectual and emotional expression” ([Henderson 1940](#), pp. 4–5). Pollock too, who attended the Buchholz exhibition with Lehman, was inspired to make his critique of Picasso's minotaur (see [Lehman 1997](#)). A small canvas that he painted around 1938–1941, *Head* (Figure 20), resembles Picasso's *Head of Bull-Man*, sketch 26 for *Guernica*, 1937 (Figure 21) in the human aspect of the bull's face. But, in Pollock's version, the suggestion of a rising serpent seeps into the bull's face: on closer inspection, the right half of the face is seen to be dominated by a striated creature that mounts in snakelike fashion, with a birdlike head and triangular beak. The head is the eye of the larger beast. A third eye presides over the normal two eyes. This snake-bird is a variant of the plumed serpent.⁶⁰ In utilizing this image Pollock is certainly not thinking of creating a mandala but rather of challenging Picasso's animal imagery directly with his own archetypal imagery, aware of the mythical potency of the plumed serpent image.⁶¹

In one of the drawings given to Henderson, *JPCR 521r* (Figure 22), Pollock explores the plumed serpent imagery that eventually makes its way into *Birth*, c. 1941. An instance of Pollock's interest in *Guernica* occurs in the lower-right-hand corner of this drawing, where he depicts a collapsing horse that is very close to one of Picasso's studies for *Guernica* (Figure 23). Pollock responds to *Guernica* in about one-fifth of the drawings that he gave to Henderson. In this particular version of the Picassoid horse, the body of a man is flung over its back, and the horse's attitude is more protesting than stricken. Further to the left and slightly up the sheet, Pollock draws, using small-scale stick figures, a man now leading a horse, as the man hails a towering rising serpent, the magical qualities of which

are reminiscent of the rising plumed serpent in his old *Mexican Folkways* cover. This area of motifs is delineated with a rectangular border (see Figure 27) as though Pollock was thinking of a future painting.

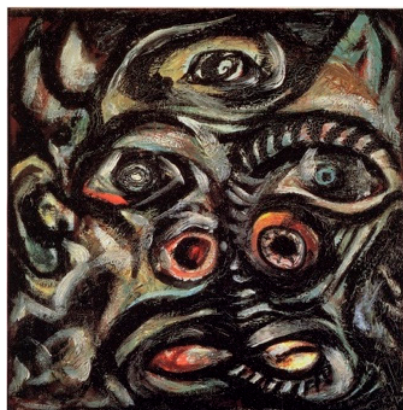


Figure 20. Jackson Pollock, *Head*, c. 1938–1941, oil on canvas, 16 × 15 ¾ in. (40.6 × 40 cm). Sintra Museu de Arte Moderna, Portugal. Photo: Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné Archives, Pollock-Krasner Study Center. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.



Figure 21. Pablo Picasso, *Head of Bull-Man*, 20 May 1937, pencil and gray gouache on white paper, 11 ½ × 9 ¼ in. (23.5 × 29.2 cm). Photo: Zervos. © 2025 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

What would have provoked Pollock's turn to Mexican serpent imagery at this junction?⁶² In addition to possible conversations with Dr. Henderson about snake and plumed serpent imagery, there were other avenues for Pollock's renewal of interest in the plumed serpent—and in Quetzalcoatl. Pollock visited the *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from May to September 1940, dominated by the commanding colossal stone statue of the goddess of earth, life and death, her head composed of two upright fanged serpent heads rising from her shoulders: *Coatlicue* (Aztec; Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City) (Figure 24).

At the exhibition he is known to have watched Orozco at work (Figure 25), painting, in response to the raging battles of World War II, a portable mural *Dive Bomber and Tank*, 1940.⁶³ The fascistic force on display in *Guernica* was now gaining the upper hand as British forces were evacuated from Dunkirk and Germany took over France and control of Europe. Here Orozco chose not to advance the Promethean aspirations of a man of fire but rather to face the horrors of war. And unlike Siqueiros, who had gone off to fight the fascists in Spain, Pollock was to be declared mentally unfit in 1941 for military service (O'Connor and Thaw 1978, vol. 4, p. 225). In his art, however, he was already turning to the positive aspects of the Quetzalcoatl

myth to contribute to this struggle. In the exhibition he would have seen a photograph of the great Temple of Quetzalcoatl studded with the powerful plumed serpent heads that Guston and Kadish had visited when they were in Mexico (see Figure 10).

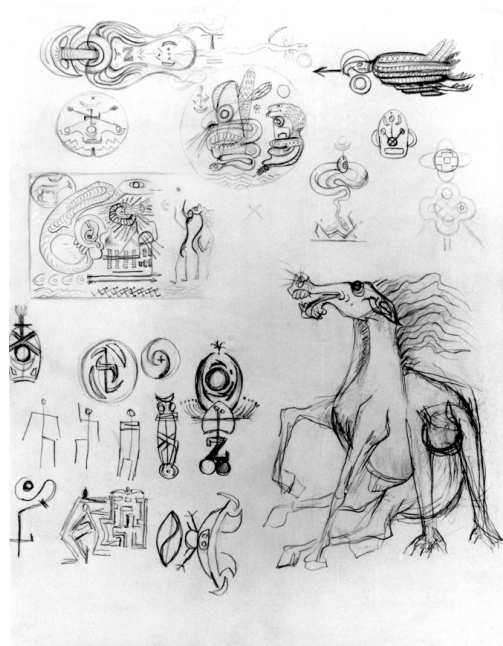


Figure 22. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled, JPCR 521r*, c. 1939–1940, pencil on paper, 14 × 11 in. (35.5 × 27.9 cm). Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Photo: Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné Archives, Pollock-Krasner Study Center. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 23. Picasso, *Horse*, 1 May 1937 (5), pencil, 8 1/4 × 10 1/2 in. (21 × 26.8 cm), study for *Guernica*. Photo: Zervos. © 2025 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Pollock could also have encountered the retelling of the Quetzalcoatl myth in Diego Rivera and Bertram Wolfe's *Story of Mexico* 1938, one of the books listed in the exhibition catalogue's bibliography. In 1938 he had visited his brother Charles who had recently moved to Detroit where Rivera had created at the Detroit Institute of Art the commanding *Detroit Industry* murals in 1931–1933, perhaps piquing Pollock's renewed interest in Rivera.⁶⁴ Rivera's and Wolfe's book illustrated Rivera's *Ancient Indian Mexico* mural at the National Palace (titled, here, "Pre-Conquest Mexico") and related, under the heading "The Feathered Serpent", the Quetzalcoatl myth contrasting Quetzalcoatl with his brother Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec god of war. Tezcatlipoca was Quetzalcoatl's "gloomy twin brother, Smoking Mirror or Night Wind, the fearful god of the moon and of fate", while Quetzalcoatl was associated with "Venus, the 'precious twin'", the evening star that returns as the morning star, a return that speaks of "man's dream of a better world". (see D. Rivera and Wolfe 1938, pp. 67–68;

plate 220). Pollock may have been referring to this aspect of the Quetzalcoatl myth in *Mask*, 1941 (Figure 26), a small painting roughly the size of *Head*.⁶⁵ There, in an unusually calm and focused canvas, Pollock depicts the profile of a Mexican Indian in a luminous white, his eye light blue surrounded by radiating lines, a star shape placed below his cheek.⁶⁶



Figure 24. *Coatlicue Statue*, Aztec culture, 2.52 m high, andesite, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 25. Orozco at work on the fresco, *Dive Bomber and Tank*, in preparation for the exhibition, “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art”, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, June 1940. Photo by Eliot Elisofon. Digital Image. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

But, rather than settle on this relatively static and pure version of Quetzalcoatl’s return, Pollock chose in *JPCR* 521r to present not only the might of the towering plumed serpent but also the dynamic tensions implicit within its image, exploring serpent and bird imagery separately.⁶⁷ For example, above the head of the Picassoid horse, Pollock draws a serpent rising and, above that, a bird in flight (visible in Figure 22). Throughout this drawing, he tries out different possibilities. Occupying the round medallion in the drawing’s upper center, we see, within two humanoid faces, two eyes and two snakes (Figure 27). The left grouping, less easy to read, suggests a profile with nose and eye: feathers rise from the snake. The snake on the right suggests with its scale-like feathers a source in Orozco’s serpent with feathers, symbol of Quetzalcoatl, depicted at the base of the “Aztec Warriors” panel at Dartmouth (Figure 28). Returning to the tail of the looming serpent that the man with his horse hails, we spot a distinctive coiling circular form, like a snake embryo with four feather-like appendages, which might also be seen as the snake’s rattles. This circular form, though here only a doodle,

will reappear in *Birth*, c. 1941, where the center of the circular form in the drawing becomes the small, but striking, dotted red disc, resembling an eye, in the canvas (Figure 29).



Figure 26. Jackson Pollock, *Mask*, 1941, oil on canvas, $16\frac{3}{4} \times 19$ in. (42.5 × 48.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired through the Enid A. Haupt Fund. Photo Credit: Digital Image. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

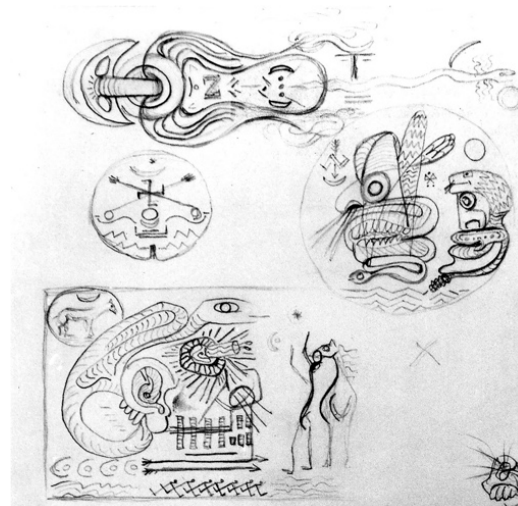


Figure 27. Detail of Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, JPCR 521r, c. 1939–1940.



Figure 28. José Clemente Orozco, *The Epic of American Civilization: "Aztec Warriors"* (Panel 4), 1932–1934. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College. Photo: Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.



Figure 29. Detail of Jackson Pollock, *Birth*, c. 1941.

7. *Birth* and the Myth of Quetzalcoatl

Pollock probably first encountered this coiled circular version of the plumed serpent reproduced in George Vaillant's *Indian Arts in North America*, 1939: an Indian stone disc from the American southeast, incised with two intertwined rattlesnakes with feathered heads, each of which has a pronounced circular eye (Figure 30). Testifying to Pollock's long interest in American Indian art and ritual, Kadish and Lehman both vividly remember the trips that they took with Pollock in the late 1930s looking at American Indian art at the American Museum of Natural History (Vaillant was a curator there) and the Museum of the American Indian.⁶⁸ Pollock actually encountered this stone disc at the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* at the Museum of Modern Art in early 1941, an exhibition that he visited on numerous occasions.⁶⁹ The exhibition catalogue notes the relationship of the feathered snakes to "Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent of Mexico". So two of his interests converge in this disc: American Indian art and myth and the Mexican plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl.⁷⁰ The catalogue also explains that the stone disc was believed to have been a palette, because traces of red and white paint had been found on similar discs (Douglas and d'Harnoncourt 1941, p. 87, plate 25). No doubt this fact helped to make the disc yet more attractive to Pollock and may help explain his bold use of red and white in *Birth*. Pollock's encounter with this stone disc may have sealed his decision to feature the circular embryo of a plumed serpent, first explored in *JPCR* 521r, now in *Birth*. The plumed serpent has the dotted red disc eye, additional yellow feathers, its importance amplified by the two crescent forms curving around the outer edge of the circle, the smaller red crescent with black dots, the larger outer crescent, white with red dots.⁷¹

It might seem strange that the theme of birth should be conveyed using the animal symbol of the plumed serpent, but not so strange given his earlier depiction of a skeletal fetus accompanied by a snake in the womb in *JPCR* 477r, c. 1938–1939 (see Figure 12). That the snake now becomes a plumed serpent is in accord with Henderson's statement in his 1939 paper "Initiation Rites" that an initiate undergoing a rite of death and rebirth experiences rebirth as his totem animal (Henderson 1939, pp. 11–12).⁷² Henderson's observation may have influenced Pollock in his choice of the plumed serpent as a symbol of rebirth in *Birth*.⁷³ Given Pollock's own encounters with the myth of Quetzalcoatl, the god's symbol as a plumed serpent and his prophecy of return (or one might say here of rebirth), and given Orozco's call to artists to meet the cultural challenge of Quetzalcoatl's return, Pollock's use of animal symbolism is not unexpected as a cultural emblem. Its appearance in *Birth* is also an early instance of Pollock's own abilities as a mythmaker. Lehman commented, "It was only after he got caught up in Jungian philosophy (or psychology)

that themes became paramount—and they were myths, not themes . . . there’s a difference between a myth and a theme”.⁷⁴



Figure 30. American Indian Stone Disc from Mississippi. Ohio State Museum, Columbus. As published in *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 87. Photo: Digital Image. ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

When Dr. Henderson had to leave New York at the end of the summer of 1940, Pollock moved to a second Jungian analyst, Dr. Violet de Lazlo. She remembers that Pollock strongly identified with Orozco.⁷⁵ Fritz Bultman, who met Pollock in December 1942, recalls Pollock’s interest in the Dartmouth murals and the Aztec plumed serpent.⁷⁶ And certainly those who orchestrated the exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* in 1940 and *Indian Art of the United States* in 1941, harbored the hope that the indigenous art of the Americas could inspire a new American art in the dangerous time of rising fascism.⁷⁷ In *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, Dr. Alfonso Caso, curator of the pre-Spanish portion of the exhibition, wrote “this exhibition of pre-Spanish art in New York ought to give a new vision to the public, above all to the artists of the United States; we hope it may be translated into works of modern American art rooted in the older art of our own continent”. (Caso 1940, p. 26). René d’Harnoncourt, in his foreword to the *Indian Art of the United States* catalogue, contrasts such hope with the shadow of the spreading war: “At this time, when America is reviewing its cultural resources, this book and the exhibit on which it is based open up to us age-old sources of ideas and forms that have never been fully appreciated”. The past and present American Indian tradition “constitutes part of the artistic and spiritual wealth of this country”, and has “a contribution to make toward the America of the future”.⁷⁸ With the plumed serpent, Pollock had found a symbolic image that could announce, as Orozco himself had challenged, the rebirth of Quetzalcoatl in a “modern migration of the spirit”, instantiating an “AMERICAN idea”.⁷⁹ “American” for Orozco involved building on the achievements of both South and North America. The plumed serpent was a symbol that had already taken root in both Americas, and Pollock was aware that the plumed serpent had this expansive lineage.⁸⁰

Also fearing fascism, Rivera produced, in June–November 1940, a mural for the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco: *The Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on the Continent*, more commonly known as *Pan American Unity* (Figure 31) (See Haskell 2020a, pp. 40–41).



Figure 31. Diego Rivera, *The Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on this Continent (Pan-American Unity)* 1940, fresco, 74 × 22 ft. (188 × 56 cm). City College of San Francisco. Photo: courtesy City College of San Francisco. © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Working in a representational style, he used the myth of Quetzalcoatl on the left side of the mural. It takes some effort to see the multi-colored plumed serpent stretching across space and time from the ancient Toltec past in the background, where Quetzalcoatl in his human guise is surrounded by figures in white, to the present where a contemporary artist sculpts the monumental head of the plumed serpent in the foreground. This scene represents the Latin American contribution to Pan-American unity. On the mural's right side, the industrial society of California represents the North American contribution, with an over-all sense that art making and creativity as basic human activities are integral to Pan-American modernity.⁸¹ Pollock was probably aware of this mural as it was reproduced in color photos in the 3 March 1941 *Life* magazine, where the snake god Quetzalcoatl was identified.⁸² Pollock's depiction of the plumed serpent, on the other hand, takes a different stylistic path, no longer subservient to a still vaguely representational modernism but challenging it with bold non-representational energy.⁸³

8. *Birth*: An American Art

In his presentation of the return of the plumed serpent in *Birth*, Pollock made a bold and pointed reference to Picasso. The hand-leg motif in the lower register of *Birth* echoes that found in Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Figure 32), a painting on show at the Museum of Modern Art and presented as the foundational root of Cubism.⁸⁴



Figure 32. Pablo Picasso, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 96 × 92 in. (243.9 × 233.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. Photo Credit: Digital Image. © 2025 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

But instead of cupping an African mask as in Picasso's painting, marking the beginning of cubism, Pollock's use of the hand-leg motif releases, or gives birth to, out of fiery oranges reminiscent of Promethean flames, upward-rising rhythms as one circular form bubbles into the next, coalescing in the third and larger plumed serpent mask, three-quarters the way up the vertical axis of the painting. Whereas the mask in *Demoiselles* is of African lineage, the plumed serpent mask in *Birth* is of an American, even Pan-American, lineage, including even identification as an artistic palette. Here, Pollock would seem to be challenging the *Demoiselles* and, in so doing, the very roots of cubism. Kadish recalled that, at the time, he and his friends "were looking . . . for something that had as much kinship to us as African art did for Cubism . . . we were trying to do a similar thing, trying to establish some kind of pride".⁸⁵

John Graham, who curated *American and French Painting* at the McMillen Gallery where *Birth* was exhibited in early 1942, most probably recognized Pollock's reference to the birth of the plumed serpent. He had lived in Mexico in the summer of 1939 and, as fellow artist Fritz Bultman recollected, was very interested in ancient Mexican art and the modern Mexican movement, even encouraging young artists in their interest in the Dartmouth murals, which he held to be "very vital".⁸⁶ In addition, he would have recognized Pollock's ability in his treatment of the plumed serpent image to convey the sensation of metamorphosis. In his own article "Primitive Art and Picasso", which we know Pollock greatly admired, Graham had pointed to Picasso's command of metamorphic form inspired by primitive art. Immersed in Jungian thinking, he also made much of the contact of both primitive artist and Picasso with the unconscious as they made their art, a psychological dimension that appealed to Pollock.⁸⁷ Such metamorphosis Graham dramatized with the article's frontispiece, an *Eskimo Mask* (Figure 33), with the subscript: "Two similar orifices seem to say: two eyes or two nostrils" (Graham 1937, p. 236).

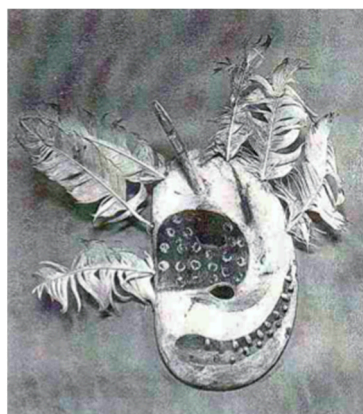


Figure 33. *Eskimo Mask*, Hooper Bay, Alaska. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. As published in John D. Graham, "Primitive Art and Picasso", *Magazine of Art* 30, no. 4 (April 1937): 236.

Lehman recalls Pollock's excited enthusiasm for "Eskimo" masks and their ability to convey, in similar forms, two different physiological facts, adding that Pollock was "attracted to Picasso's ability to utilize similar configurations in *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and then deliberately put that in his own words" (Lehman 1997). Pollock's "own words" are, in *Birth*, the similarity of the two circular forms in the plumed serpent mask: the red eye of the plumed serpent on the left and the second "eye" of a more humanoid frontal face on the right (see Figure 29). The red eye of the first might also be seen as the eye of a bird, as noted by Renato Gonzalez Mello, if one sees the curved white shape as the beak of an eagle, such as the one that can also be found in the top right of his c. 1939–1940 drawing, *JPCR* 521r (see Figure 22).⁸⁸ There, we have already seen Pollock exploring the conflation of a

human face, serpent, and bird. It is probable that the *Eskimo Mask* frontispiece to Graham's article published in 1937 did, as scholars have suggested, play a role in Pollock's growing command of metamorphic form.⁸⁹

Equally striking in *Birth* is the way in which Pollock expands upon the meaning of the plumed serpent as a creature that rises upwards, amplifying the sensation of formal transformation as the two lower and less-defined masks coalesce into the third mask containing the plumed serpent with its multiple permutations. These rising rhythms in *Birth* continue in the final twist of red and white lines entering the top dark and as-yet-undefined disc. Pollock's ability to create these rising linear rhythms is celebrated in *JPCR* 594, c. 1941–1942 (Figure 34), a drawing that the Tate catalogue entry on *Birth* remarks is most closely linked to the final painting ([Tate Gallery Entry 1988](#)).

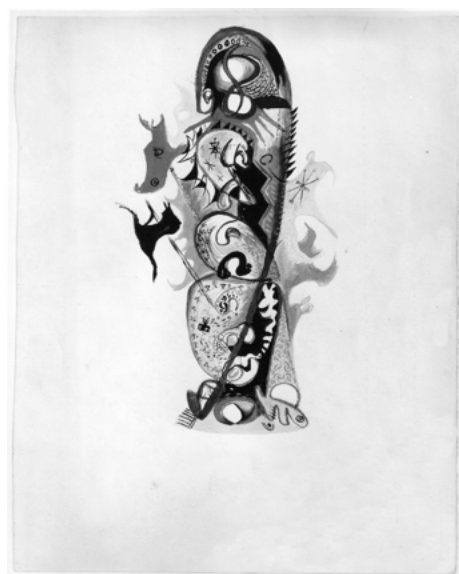


Figure 34. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled, JPCR 594*, c. 1941–1942. India ink and watercolor on watercolor paper, 13 × 10 1/4 in. (33 × 26 cm). Photo: Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné Archives, Pollock-Krasner Study Center. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

There, an upward bubbling sequence of abstract forms is threaded by one long line that sweeps upward and comes to rest at the top of the vertical axis of the drawing. Small pronged linear marks at the foot of the line and the small jagged triangles three-quarters the way up are traditional Indian markings for wings.⁹⁰ This long line is a more abstract version of the rising plumed serpent that first attracted him on the 1928 cover of *Mexican Folkways*.

Pollock's treatment of the mythologem of the return of Quetzalcoatl in *Birth* is distinctive. Quetzalcoatl returns not as Marx, Rivera's intimation of a Communist future for the Mexican government, nor is the Quetzalcoatl myth simply a Mexican myth damaged by American capitalism and imperialism as Siqueiros presented it in *Tropical America*, nor is the mythologem of the return of Quetzalcoatl simply a myth that ends in Orozco's generalized challenge of a "Modern Migration of the Spirit". Rather, Pollock's treatment of the myth actually brings about the birth of a new AMERICAN art called for by Orozco, to continue this myth onwards in modern times. Driven by a deeply personal emotional energy, Pollock's *Birth* has Pan-American cultural implications, capable of challenging Picasso's European art. Within *Birth*, we discover a first intimation of the abstract rhythmic linear energy of his mature painting, "energy and motion/made visible" as Pollock later described it.⁹¹ *Birth* is the beginning of a journey that will culminate in the great abstract poured paintings of 1950, *One* and *Autumn Rhythm* (Figure 35). I trace that journey, which lets Pollock leave behind a cubism still rooted in the visible world to create a visual language of abstract

rhythms that, while rooted in his personal concern with myth, speaks to us all in my book *Jackson Pollock: Kunst als Sinnsuche* (Langhorne 2013).



Figure 35. Pollock elaborating the leftmost section of *Autumn Rhythm* 1950. Photo by Hans Namuth. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of the Estate of Hans Namuth. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in this study are available in published sources.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ On impact of Siqueiros and Orozco on art of Pollock, see Haskell (2020a, pp. 37–39, 148), and Mello (2020, p. 177).
- ² For example, Varnedoe’s negative summary has been echoed by Messinger (2012, p. 39); by Landau (2013, pp. 73–76); by Zimmer (2016, pp. 97, 102 note 24); by Mello (2020, pp. 177–78); by Gallo (2024, p. 44). On the other hand, Steven Polcari in pointing out the impact of Orozco’s post-Dartmouth murals on Pollock does note his growing emphasis on creativity and birth, due in part to his growing attention to Native American art and ritual, and psychic life. See Polcari (2012, pp. 10–16). From an aesthetic perspective, Storr points out “the vocabulary of form construction and destruction” that Pollock learned from Orozco. See Storr (1999, p. 51).
- ³ See illustrations of Orozco’s “Gods of the Modern World” (panel 15) and Pollock’s *Nude Woman with Skeleton*, c. 1938–1941 in Haskell (2020a, pp. 37, 78–79).
- ⁴ For an initial mention, see Langhorne (1979, p. 129), and for a detailed discussion, see Langhorne (1989, p. 67).
- ⁵ For rejection of the identification of the mask as a plumed serpent, see Tate Gallery Entry (1988), and Lewison (1999, pp. 14, 18). For acceptance of this identification, see Rampley (1996, p. 86); Firestone (2008, p. 716), and Firestone (2017, p. 99); Polcari (2008b, p. 34) and Polcari and Klein (2008, p. 182), see in *Birth* the presence of coiled serpents and an eagle, but do not identify the mask as a plumed serpent.
- ⁶ JP had in his library the 1928 cover of *Mexican Folkways* 4, no. 3. See O’Connor and Thaw (1978, vol. 4, p. 197).
- ⁷ Letter from Jackson to Charles and Frank, 22 October 1929, in Pollock and Family (2011, p. 16).
- ⁸ On Pollock’s left-leaning politics, see Landau (2013, p. 178, n. 2).
- ⁹ D. Rivera (1926), cover. Available online: https://digital.iai.spkberlin.de/viewer/!image/1012501310/1/LOG_0003/. Accessed on 11 November 2024.
- ¹⁰ For an overview of Rivera’s hermetic interests and an illustration of his Coat of Arms for the Rosicrucian lodge, see Mello (2008, pp. 28–29).
- ¹¹ Tony Smith, Interview with James Valliere, in Harrison (2000, p. 226).
- ¹² On Pollock and theosophy, see Naifeh and Smith (1989, pp. 126–29, 138, 143, 822), and Landau (1989, p. 24).
- ¹³ Manuel Tolegian, quoted in Potter (1985, pp. 28–29).
- ¹⁴ Letter to Charles, 31 January 1930, in Pollock and Family (2011, p. 19).
- ¹⁵ On mystical force of rising energy, Mello (2004, p. 177).

- 16 Peter Busa, quoted in Naifeh and Smith (1989, p. 298). Pollock repeated this to Tony Smith whom he met in 1948, Interview with James Valliere, in Harrison (2000, p. 226).
- 17 For Rivera's sketch see entry in D. Rivera (1931, p. 59, no. 102): *Two Studies for Fresco in the National Palace, Mexico*, Pencil with color, 21 × 14 in. Collection of the artist. For its illustration, see Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, "Visions of the History of Mexico: Palacio Nacional and Palacio de Cortés, Mexico", in J. R. C. Rivera (2018, p. 206), where title and dimensions are given as *Sketch for the panel "Ancient Mexico"*, 50 × 36 cm. For iconography of Rivera's "The Ancient Indian World", see Coffey (2020, p. 96).
- 18 Lehman, conversation with Robert Storr, 1998, quoted in Storr (1999, p. 43).
- 19 On watching Rivera paint *Man at the Crossroads* 1933, see Potter (1985, p. 38), and paint *Portrait of America* 1933, see O'Connor (1967, p. 23, n. 13).
- 20 See Coffey (2020, p. 7). For illustration of Quetzalcoatl in the guise of Karl Marx in upper center of "Mexico Today and Tomorrow", 1934, on south wall of the stairwell, National Palace, see Coffey (2020, p. 49, Figure 1.3).
- 21 On Sande and Kadish as assistants, see Landau (1989, p. 46). On Schwankovsky as assistant, see Merrell (2010).
- 22 On Lehman earlier working with Siqueiros in Los Angeles and on attending the Congress, see Lehman (1997). On the Pollock brothers attending the Congress, see Harten (1995, p. 46).
- 23 On the Siqueiros–Rivera debate, see Harten (1995, pp. 45–46), and Azuela et al. (1994).
- 24 Lehman, notes for a lecture on Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, delivered at the Detroit Institute of Arts 1986, in Lehman's archives, cited in Storr (1999, p. 44).
- 25 On Siqueiros' impact on Pollock, see (Harten 1995; Storr 1999, pp. 52–59; Landau 2013, pp. 81–87; Haskell 2020b, p. 148).
- 26 Motherwell quoted in Gordon (1980, p. 48).
- 27 See *Birth of Fascism* (first version) illustrated in Hurlburt (1989, Figure 218).
- 28 Jackson, Letter to Stella, 28 May 1936, in Pollock and Family (2011, p. 86).
- 29 Sanford, Letter to Stella, 29 June 1936, in Pollock and Family (2011, p. 87).
- 30 David Alfaro Siqueiros letter to Jackson Pollock, Sandy Pollock, and Harold Lehman, December 1936. In Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner papers, c. 1914–1984. Archives of American Art, Available online: <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/david-alfaro-siqueiros-letter-to-jackson-pollock-sandy-pollock-and-harold-lehman-13785>. Accessed on 14 November 2024.
- 31 On the Dartmouth trip and these companions, see Naifeh and Smith (1989, pp. 298, 843), based on interviews with Reginald Wilson. Naifeh and Smith (1989, p. 290), dated the trip to spring 1936, but due to the correction of the date of Guston's arrival in New York City to mid–October 1936, provided in Roberts and Cooper (2020, pp. 224, 248 n. 38), I place the Dartmouth trip to late 1936.
- 32 Landau (2013) in her discussion of this mural chooses to use the last title. *The Struggle Against Terrorism* is also illustrated in Haskell (2020b, p. 159).
- 33 For length of stay, see Sanford, Letter to Charles, 30 January 1937, Pollock and Family (2011, p. 113). For talk of art, see Ashton (1990, p. 34).
- 34 On visiting "temple of Quetzalcoatl" at Teotihuacan, and on seeing work by Rivera, Letter from Guston to Harold Lehman, 14 July 1934, cited in Ashton (1990, p. 31).
- 35 The entire cycle is illustrated in Nadeau (2018, pp. 8–9) and as a digital scroll at <https://www.dartmouth.edu/digitalorozco/app/>. (accessed on 20 November 2024).
- 36 In addition to Haskell (2020a), see (Polcari 2012, p. 12; Coffey 2012, p. 29).
- 37 Bass (1984, p. 49), sees *Modern Migration of the Spirit* as "the climax of the mural". Coffey (2020, pp. 79, 204–5), interprets the "Modern Migration of the Spirit" as inviting the viewer to become a proxy for the ax-wielding Christ, and concludes "the possibility divine violence affords us, to rethink our relationship to truth, God, justice, and sovereignty, is the space opened up for human responsibility, action and agency".
- 38 Haskell (2020a, pp. 18, 36) also points to the similarity between the Promethean and Quetzalcoatl myths as treated by Orozco at Pomona and later at Dartmouth.
- 39 Peter Busa, quoted in Naifeh and Smith (1989, p. 298). Also Tony Smith, Interview with James Valliere, in Harrison (2000, p. 226).
- 40 José Clemente Orozco, "Prospectus for Dartmouth Mural/Epigraphs: Handwritten statement by Orozco during his second visit to Dartmouth in early May 1932 for a press release issued on 25 May 1932", cited in Coffey (2020, p. 79).
- 41 Dickerson and Orozco (1934), n.p. Orozco's satire of modern American education in "Gods of the Modern World" of course provoked the ire of some, for example Watts (1934, p. 26). His "acidulous diatribe" was then amplified in the popular press in Time Magazine (1934). Available online: *Time Magazine*, "Art: Dead from the Dead" (17 September 1934). Accessed 15 November 2024. The Dartmouth mural controversy continued. See O'Neill (1934, pp. 6, 21), then Mumford (1934b, pp. 231–35), followed by Mumford (1934a, p. 10). Such controversy would have heightened Pollock's and the public's awareness of the Quetzalcoatl myth and its challenges.
- 42 On Sande's marriage, see Naifeh and Smith (1989, pp. 290, 293, 295). For date of Guston's marriage, see Roberts and Cooper (2020, p. 224). On trouble with mother, see letter from Sanford to Charles Pollock, October 1941, in Pollock and Family (2011, p. 178).

- On birth as a blue baby, see [Naifeh and Smith \(1989, p. 43\)](#).
- Pollock's Sketchbook III, which includes *JPCR* 477r, is dated c. 1938–1939. See "Sketchbooks and Related Drawings" in [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 3, pp. 13–15\)](#), and [Messinger \(1997, p. 61\)](#). Messinger does, however, extend the date for the sketchbook as a whole to c. 1938–1941, due to a drawing on the cover probably executed after the pages within; p. 83, n. 2. On availability of Orozco reproductions, see [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 3, p. 14\)](#) and [Messinger \(1997, p. 64\)](#).
- On the impact of Orozco's *Man of Fire* on "The Flight of Man" bowl, see [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 3, p. 15\)](#).
- For his writing on snake symbolism, see [Henderson \(1940, n.p.\)](#).
- For Pollock's collection of Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology volumes acquired between 1930–1935, see [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 4, p. 192\)](#). On Hopi and Sia snake ceremonies, see [Fewkes \(1897\)](#); [Fewkes \(1900\)](#); [Stevenson \(1889–1890, p. 40\)](#).
- O'Connor points out that Pollock's birth trauma, choked by the cord, is symbolized over and over in the imagery of the Henderson drawings and the works related to them of 1939–1942 by the recurrent motif of the snake, or a ropelike shape, on or about the heads and necks of figures. See [O'Connor \(1980, p. 9\)](#).
- Henderson, letter to B. H. Friedman, 11 November 1969, quoted in [Friedman \(1972, p. 41\)](#).
- [Jung \(1971, p. 478\)](#). For the cultural appeal of Jungian convictions for future Abstract Expressionists, including Pollock, see Polcari, "Jung and the Psychomythic Quest" in [Polcari \(1991, pp. 43–45\)](#).
- Henderson, Interview with anonymous, in [Anon \(1971, p. 28\)](#).
- Thomas Singer found out about this drawing in 2003 when Henderson was publishing the second edition of *Thresholds of Initiation*. Based on conversations with Henderson he published the drawing with illustrations and an unpaginated exegesis in [Singer \(2006\)](#).
- Henderson, Interview with Naifeh and Smith, [Naifeh and Smith \(1989, p. 333\)](#).
- Henderson, quoted in [Rose \(1967, Notes, p. 10\)](#).
- Henderson, quoted in [Gordon \(1980, p. 51, n. 18\)](#).
- Lee Krasner, Interview with Judith Wolfe, 25 April 1972, in [J. Wolfe \(1972, p. 73, n. 10\)](#).
- Pollock, Interview with Selden Rodman, June 1956, in [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 4, p. 275, doc. 113\)](#).
- I agree with Claude Cernuschi's statement that Pollock's art at this time presents "no political ideology" in the manner of the Mexican muralists. See [Cernuschi \(1992, pp. 32, 34\)](#). Rather Pollock's politics take on a moral coloration, manifest in his engagement with the myth of the plumed serpent.
- [Landau \(1981\)](#), referred to in [Naifeh and Smith \(1989, p. 406\)](#).
- In *Head* Landau also points to Pollock's "arrogation of Picasso's subjective engagement with the Minotaur", noting, however, only "a devouring snake" and the disembodied eye as contributing to the "haunted" image. [Landau \(1989, pp. 76–77\)](#).
- Unaware of Pollock's preoccupation with the myth of the plumed serpent, [Cernuschi \(1992, pp. 47, 49\)](#). focuses his discussion of *Head* on its relationship to Picasso and the myth of the minotaur.
- Pollock's interest in the Mexican serpent at this time is indicated by his depiction in the lower right of *JPCR* 520r, c. 1939–1940 of an eagle holding in its beak the writhing body of a snake, a motif used on the Mexican flag and featured in Orozco's *Allegory of Mexico* (1940, Gabino Ortiz Library, Jiquilpan, Jalisco, Mexico) which influenced Pollock's *Composition with Woman* (c. 1938–1940), Private Collection.
- On watching Orozco at work, see [Karlstrom \(1984, p. 27, n. 24\)](#).
- On Jackson's visit to Charles in Detroit, see [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 1, p. 223\)](#). On the impact of Rivera's Chapingo Chapel murals on Pollock around 1939, in particular "the story of my life" bowl with its foetal imagery, see [Langhorne \(1989, p. 88, n. 35\)](#).
- Pollock titled this canvas *Mask*, perhaps indicative of his own growing interests in masks. Note that the title "Spanish Head" appears on the back of several photographs of this canvas. See [O'Connor and Thaw \(1978, vol. 1, p. 55\)](#).
- [Polcari \(2008a, p. 48\)](#) sees the white profile in *Mask* as that of a woman, an identification with which I disagree. But he also sees this profile as set within references to the heads of a horse and a bull, the mythological animals of Picasso's *Guernica*. This complements my interpretation of *Mask* as the image of Guetzalcoatl, for the painting now acquires a meaning similar to that found in *Head* c. 1938–1941 (Figure 20): Pollock's use of the myth of Guetzalcoatl and the plumed serpent to challenge Picasso's mythological animals.
- Two other drawings of this period show Pollock's preoccupation with the schematic of a serpent rising: in *JPCR* 554, c. 1939–1940 a totem pole configuration shows a serpent rising towards a bird and between the heads of a bull and a horse, the animals used by Picasso in *Guernica*; in the upper right of *JPCR* 581v, c. 1939–1942 a serpent rises up from the lower register, with its several humanoid heads, between the feathered wings in the middle register, and towards the single eye of a humanoid head dominating the top of the motif.
- [Kadish \(Kadish c. 1965\)](#) and Kadish, Interview with Naifeh and Smith, [Naifeh and Smith \(1989, p. 281\)](#). [Lehman \(1997\)](#) stated: "I was with Pollock all the time at the Museum of Natural History and we were fascinated by the totem poles and the carvings of the Northwest Indian, Canadian Indians, as well of course the Mexicans: Aztecs and Mayans".

- 69 Bultman and Dr. de Laszlo recall Pollock attending the “Indian Art of the United States” exhibition. Bultman, Interview with Rushing, in [Rushing \(1986, p. 282\)](#); Interview with Dr. de Laszlo, in [Gordon \(1980, pp. 48–49\)](#).
- 70 The overlap of American Indian and Mexican references to the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl was noted in the Exposition of the American Indian at Grand Central Galleries, New York City, in December 1931. See Herbert J. Spinden’s well-illustrated catalogue essay “Indian Symbolism”, in Hodge, La Farge, and Spinden, eds. ([Hodge et al. 1931, pp. 7–18](#)), one of a number of essays published as separate booklets, in which Spinden emphasized “the very powerful plumed serpent” and traced the spread of the plumed serpent symbol throughout the Americas, from its Mayan roots to its Toltec florescence, Aztec resurgence, and diffusion northwards to the Pueblo Indians in the American Southwest, the Mound-Builders in the Mid-West, the Plains Indians, and the tribes along the Northwest Coast. This exposition was the first in which Indian art was presented not solely as ethnographic material, but as art, and valued for its aesthetic and spiritual qualities. Such qualities the organizers hoped might have an impact on the evolution of American art. See for example Spinden, “Fine Art and the First Americans”, in Hodge, La Farge, and Spinden, eds. ([Hodge et al. 1931, pp. 69, 70, 74](#)). It is not known if Pollock, recently arrived in New York, saw this show or catalogue, but it is very likely given his early interest in the American Indian, and Reuben Kadish’s statement, referencing ethnic, American Indian and contemporary art, that he and Pollock “in 1931 to 1933 . . . always went to the shows”. [Kadish \(Kadish c. 1965\)](#).
- 71 As noted in [Tate Gallery Entry \(1988\)](#), Michael Newman points to the similarity of the white crescent with red and black dots in *Birth* to a Northwest Coast Indian mask at the Museum of the American Indian; [Newman \(1979, p. 26, Figure 25\)](#).
- 72 See [Henderson \(1939, pp. 11–12\)](#). Pollock had a notation to this article in a list of seven Jungian papers dating between 1936–39. See [Leja \(1993, pp. 150–51\)](#).
- 73 Stephen Polcari also stresses the role of death-rebirth in Pollock’s work of 1938–1941 and in *Birth* which he presents as deriving from Pollock’s knowing embrace of American Indian shamanic ritual. Such ritual revolves around an experience of death and rebirth, the purpose of which is societal renewal. To counter the persistent idea that Pollock is merely drawing from the personal unconscious of someone who is psychologically disturbed, and building on his understanding of the general cultural attraction in the 1930s to the Jungian call for societal renewal drawing on archetypes of a collective unconscious, Polcari emphasizes Pollock’s embrace of this social role. See [Polcari \(2008b, p. 34\)](#); [Polcari and Klein \(2008, pp. 182, 186\)](#). Much of this material is integrated into an essay available in English, “Jackson Pollock’s Shamanism”, <http://stephenpolcari.com/squarespace/Website/Shamanism.htm>. Accessed on 15 June 2021. This current essay in treating the dynamic of death-rebirth stresses rather the specifics of Pollock’s life experience, whether personal or cultural, and focuses on his attention to the symbolic image of the rising serpent and the myth of Quetzalcoatl.
- 74 [Lehman \(1997\)](#). For a full discussion of Pollock as a mythmaker in the early and mid 1940s, see [Langhorne \(2013, especially pp. 120–23, 171–73\)](#). The English manuscript is available at https://www.academia.edu/108515122/Jackson_Pollock_Art_as_a_Search_for_Meaning, see especially pp. 131–37, 207–9. (accessed on 30 November 2024). Also see [Langhorne \(2015\)](#).
- 75 De Laszlo, Letter to author, 14 March 1973.
- 76 Fritz Bultman, Interviews with author, 22 March 1973, and 1 February 1980.
- 77 These two exhibitions culminated the sequence of shows in New York that had started with “The Exposition of the American Indian” in 1931 in hopes that a new American art might arise from primitive and Pre-Columbian antecedents. For an overview of these exhibitions in the 1930s and the two culminating exhibitions, see [Rushing \(1995, pp. 97–120, especially 104–8\)](#).
- 78 René d’Harnoncourt, Foreword. In [Douglas and d’Harnoncourt \(1941, p. 8\)](#).
- 79 For Pollock’s continued commitment to art as a pursuit of the spiritual, see [Langhorne \(2013, especially pp. 19–21, 88–92, 107–10, 113–14\)](#) ([Jackson_Pollock_Art_as_a_Search_for_Meaning](#), especially pp. 16–18, 93–97, 116–19, 124–25). See also [Langhorne \(2023\)](#).
- 80 The positive aspects of Pollock’s appropriation of the myth of Quetzalcoatl should correct Michael Leja’s overly negative understanding of Pollock’s use of primitive sources. In what Leja labels the “Modern Man” cultural discourse of the 1930s, which he understands as influencing Pollock, the primitive becomes, in answering the rise of fascism, a category for “conceiving of the irrational, the barbaric, the evil of which modern man was showing himself capable”; [Leja \(1993, p. 66\)](#). Leja’s understanding of the primitive in respect to Pollock is echoed in [Lewison \(1999, p. 13\)](#) and [Zimmer \(2016, p. 96\)](#).
- 81 James Oles, whose early exploration of the Mexican contribution to American Art started with the 1993–1994 exhibition *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914–1947*, emphasizes in his “Introduction” to the 2022 catalogue for the exhibition *Diego Rivera’s America*, Rivera’s understanding in the *Pan-American Unity* mural of “America” not only as the United States but as “hemispheric”, [Oles \(2022, p. 12\)](#). On Pan-American creativity see [Fox \(2022, p. 235\)](#).
- 82 [Life Magazine \(1941, March 3, pp. 52–56\)](#). If Pollock was not already aware through discussions with Siqueiros, Lehman and Sande in 1935–1936 of Rivera’s conclusion to the Quetzalcoatl myth in 1935 at the National Palace, in which Quetzalcoatl returned in the guise of Karl Marx to preside over a socialist modernization in Mexico, he might have later become aware of this conclusion as it was discussed and illustrated in both D. [Rivera and Wolfe \(1938, pp. 65–68, 205–6, plates 220, 228, 241\)](#) and B. D. [Wolfe \(1939, pp. 300–2 and plates 97, 98\)](#).
- 83 Meyer Schapiro, the art historian and critic who wrote in the 1930s on the relationship of artists’ growing interest in modernist art and their simultaneous desire to create revolutionary politically aware art, articulates a nuanced understanding that applies to

Pollock. In Schapiro (1937, p. 77), a copy of which was in the Pollock library (see O'Connor and Thaw 1978, vol. 4, p. 197), he writes: "This new responsiveness to primitive art was evidently more than aesthetic; a whole complex of longings, moral values and broad conceptions of life were fulfilled in it".

- 84 The reference to Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* has been widely recognized. See Langhorne (1989, p. 86, n. 6). In addition to being on exhibition in *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, November 1939–January 1940, at the Museum of Modern Art, *Demoiselles d'Avignon* was included in *The Masterpieces of Picasso* at the museum in July–September 1941.
- 85 Kadish, personal communication with Rushing, September 24, 1986, quoted in Rushing (1995, p. 232, n. 90). In its January 18, 1941 issue *Art News* had dramatized the art historical importance of the *Demoiselles*, as containing the germ of Cubism and demonstrating the impact of African sculpture on its creation.
- 86 On summer in Mexico, see Kokkinen (1976, p. 99, p. 103, n. 6). Bultman, Interviews with author, 22 March 1973, and 1 February 1980.
- 87 On importance of Graham's article, see Landau (1989, p. 119), and Langhorne (1998, pp. 48–49).
- 88 Remark made by Renato Gonzalez Mello in response to Elizabeth Langhorne, "Mexico and the Birth of Jackson Pollock's Art", Lichenstein Lecture, Pollock-Krasner House, 17 July 2022. Polcari and Klein (2008, p. 182), also notes the presence of a bird.
- 89 On this *Eskimo Mask* as a source for *Birth*, see Sandler (1980, p. 57), Cernuschi (1992, pp. 49–52), Polcari and Klein (2008, p. 182) and Snrech and Stalpers (2024, p. 70); Landau (1989, p. 63), notes that another mask of the same type from the Hooper Bay region was exhibited and illustrated in Douglas and d'Harnoncourt (1941, p. 43). Recently Zimmer (2016, pp. 101–2), elaborates on the influence of these masks on the forms and colors of *Birth*. Beyond the influence of the Eskimo mask on *Birth* is the pervasive influence of the principle of metamorphosis in two other paintings dated c. 1941, whether created before or after *Birth* is unknown: *Bird* where a central plumed serpent motif sprouts wings, and *Naked Man* where a standing man wears a bird mask. Both can be understood as challenges to other Picasso's canvases. See Langhorne (1989, pp. 71 ff, 78 ff). These paintings speak to Pollock's extensive mythmaking using the plumed serpent, bird and human head motifs in 1941.
- 90 See in Pollock's library Fewkes (1900–1901, pp. 73–81, especially Figures 28–30, 32–34), that show triangular and parallel line feathers. Fewkes also notes, p. 25, that effigies of the Plumed Snake play an important part in Pueblo culture ceremonies, the conception distinctly a Mexican one, recalling Quetzalcoatl.
- 91 O'Connor and Thaw (1978, vol. 4, p. 253, doc. 90), undated holograph statement, probably from 1950.

References

- Anon. 1971. How a disturbed genius talked to his analyst with art. *Medical World News*, February 5, 18–28.
- Artimorean Art and Media. 2019. *Diego Rivera Coloring Book 1931: Sixteen Pages of Original Art by World Renowned Mexican Artist, Diego Rivera*. Edited by Eric King and Craig Trahan. Austin: Artimorean Art and Media. First published 1931.
- Ashton, Dore. 1990. *A Critical Study of Philip Guston*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available online: <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft4x0nb2f0;chunk.id=0;doc.view=print> (accessed on 11 November 2024).
- Azuela, Alicia, Colleen Kattau, and David Craven. 1994. On Public Art, Meyer Schapiro and Mexican Muralism. *Oxford Art Journal* 17: 55–59. [CrossRef]
- Bass, Jacquelyn. 1984. Interpreting Orozco's Epic. *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*. January–February. Available online: <https://archive.dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/article/1984/1/1/interpreting-orozcos-epic> (accessed on 20 November 2024).
- Benton, Thomas H. 1969. *An American in Art*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Caso, Alfonso. 1940. Pre-Spanish Art. In *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*. Exhibition Catalogue. New York: Museum of Modern Art, pp. 23–26. Available online: https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2985_300061951.pdf (accessed on 20 November 2024).
- Cernuschi, Claude. 1992. *Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance*, New York Icon ed. New York: HarperCollins Publisher.
- Coffey, Mary K. 2012. An "AMERICAN Idea": Myth, Indigeneity, and Violence in the Work of Orozco and Pollock. In *Men of Fire: José Clemente Orozco and Jackson Pollock*. Edited by Mary K. Coffey. Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, pp. 21–36.
- Coffey, Mary K. 2020. *Orozco's American Epic: Myth, History, and the Melancholy of Race*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Collins, Mabel. 1913. *Light on the Path*. Point Loma: Theosophical Publishing Company.
- Dickerson, Albert, and José Clemente Orozco. 1934. *The Orozco Frescoes at Dartmouth*. Hanover: n.p.
- Douglas, Frederic H., and Rene d'Harnoncourt. 1941. *Indian Art of the United States*. Exhibition Catalogue. New York: Museum of Modern Art.
- Eisenberg, Emanuel. 1935. Battle of the Century. *New Masses* 17: 18–20.
- Fewkes, Jesse Walter. 1897. Tusayan Snake Ceremonies. *Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology of Smithsonian Institution* 16: 273–326.
- Fewkes, Jesse Walter. 1900. Tusayan Flute and Snake Ceremonies. *Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology of Smithsonian Institution* 19: 957–1011.

- Fewkes, Jesse Walter. 1900–1901. Two summers' work in pueblo ruins. *Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology of Smithsonian Institution* 22, Pt I: 3–195. Available online: https://books.google.com/books?id=ougNAAAIIAAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed on 25 November 2024).
- Firestone, Evan R. 2008. Jackson Pollock's *The Magic Mirror*: Jung, Shamanism, and John Graham. *Modernism/Modernity* 15: 703–24. [CrossRef]
- Firestone, Evan R. 2017. *Animism and Shamanism in Twentieth Century Art: Kandinsky, Ernst, Pollock, Beuys*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fort, Ilene Susan. 2000. Altered State(s): California Art and the Inner World. In *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*. Edited by Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein and Ilene Susan Fort. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 33–40.
- Fox, Claire F. 2022. Diego Rivera's Pan-America. In *Diego Rivera's America*. Edited by James Oles. Oakland: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in Association with University of California Press, pp. 224–35.
- Friedman, B. H. 1972. *Jackson Pollock*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Gallo, Ruben. 2024. Pour une nouvelle lecture des dessins psychoanalytiques de Pollock. In *Jackson Pollock: Les Premières Années (1934–1947)*. Edited by Joanne Snrech and Orane Stalpers. Paris: Musée National Picasso-Paris. Editions Flammarion, pp. 38–47.
- Gamio, Manuel. 1922. *La población del Valle de Teotihuacán, el medio en que se ha desarrollado; su evolución étnica y social, iniciativas para procurar su mejoramiento, por la Dirección de Antropología, siendo director de las investigaciones, Manuel Gamio*. Mexico City: Dirección de Taller Gráfica, Secretaría de Educación Pública.
- Gordon, Donald E. 1980. Pollock's *Bird*, or How Jung Did Not Offer Much Help in Myth-Making. *Art in America* 68: 43–53.
- Graham, John D. 1937. Primitive Art and Picasso. *Magazine of Art* 30: 236–39, 260. [CrossRef]
- Harding, M. Esther. 1940. "Totalitarianism", *The Psychological Aspects of the War*. In *Papers of the Analytical Psychology Club of New York City*. New York: Kristine Mann Library.
- Harrison, Helen A., ed. 2000. *Such Desperate Joy: Imagining Jackson Pollock*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Harten, Jürgen. 1995. *Siqueiros/Pollock, Pollock/Siqueiros*. Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.
- Haskell, Barbara. 2020a. América: Mexican muralism and Art in the United States, 1925–1945. In *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945*. Edited by Barbara Haskell. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, pp. 14–45.
- Haskell, Barbara, ed. 2020b. *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art.
- Henderson, Joseph. 1939. Initiation rites. In *Papers of the Analytical Psychology Club of New York*. Typescript. New York: Kristine Mann Library, vol. 3, pp. 1–16. April.
- Henderson, Joseph. 1940. Minotaur. *Bulletin of the Analytical Psychology Club of New York*, 2, no. 3, n.p.
- Henderson, Joseph. 1982. Jackson Pollock: Notes concerning the nature of his drawings and his art therapy (excerpts from an interview by Jeffrey Potter). In *Such Desperate Joy: Imagining Jackson Pollock*. Edited by Helen Harrison. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, pp. 84–85.
- Hill, Gareth S. 1978. J. L. H.: His Life and His Work. In *The Shaman from Elko*. San Francisco: C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco.
- Hodge, Frederick Webb, Oliver La Farge, and Herbert J. Spinden, eds. 1931. *Introduction to American Indian Art, Part II*. New York: The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts.
- Hurlburt, Laurance P. 1989. *The Mexican Muralists in the United States*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1934. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Translated by William Stanley Dell, and Cary F. Baynes. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1938. *Psychology and Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1971. *Psychological Types*. A Revision by Francis Carrington Hull of the 1923 Translation by Helton Godwin Baynes. Bollingen Series XX; Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kadish, Reuben. c. 1965. Interview. In *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner Papers, c. 1914–1984*. Washington, DC: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Available online: https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/CollectionsOnline/polljack/Box_0003/Folder_003 (accessed on 19 November 2024).
- Karlstrom, Paul. 1984. Jackson Pollock and Louis Bunce. *Archives of American Art Journal* 24: 22–27. [CrossRef]
- Kokkinen, Elia. 1976. John Graham During the 1940's. *Arts Magazine* 51: 99–103.
- Landau, Ellen G. 1981. Lee Krasner: A Study of Her Early Career (1926–1949). Ph.D. thesis, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA.
- Landau, Ellen G. 1989. *Jackson Pollock*. New York: Abrams.
- Landau, Ellen G. 2013. *Mexico and American Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 1979. Jackson Pollock's 'The Moon Woman Cuts the Circle'. *Arts Magazine* 53: 128–37.
- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 1989. Pollock, Picasso and the Primitive. *Art History* 12: 66–92. [CrossRef]
- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 1998. The Magus and the Alchemist: John Graham and Jackson Pollock. *American Art* 12: 46–67. [CrossRef]

- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 2013. *Jackson Pollock: Kunst als Sinnsuche*. Translated by Karsten Harries from English manuscript *Portrait and a Dream: Jackson Pollock's Search for Meaning*. Wallerstein: Hawel Verlag, English Manuscript. Available online: https://www.academia.edu/108515122/Jackson_Pollock_Art_as_a_Search_for_Meaning (accessed on 19 November 2024).
- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 2015. From Mythic Narrative to Abstract Automatism: Jackson Pollock, Andre Masson, and Stanley William Hayter. *Kunstgeschichte*. Available online: <https://www.kunstgeschichte-ejournal.net/463/> (accessed on 21 November 2024).
- Langhorne, Elizabeth L. 2023. Self-Betrayal or Self-Deception? The Case of Jackson Pollock. *Arts* 12: 54. [CrossRef]
- Lehman, Harold. 1997. Interview with Steven Polcari. In Archives of Oral History, Smithsonian Institution. Available online: <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-harold-lehman-12894> (accessed on 14 November 2024).
- Leja, Michael. 1993. *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lewison, Jeremy. 1999. *Interpreting Pollock*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing.
- Life Magazine. 1941. Diego Rivera, His Amazing New Mural Depicts Pan-American Unity. *Life* 10: 52–56. Available online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=IUoEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA52#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed on 20 November 2024).
- Mello, Renato González. 2004. Manuel Gamio, Diego Rivera and the Politics of Mexican Anthropology. *RES* 45: 161–85. [CrossRef]
- Mello, Renato González. 2008. 1923–1928 Political vision: Ministry of Public Education (SEP). In *Diego Rivera: The Complete Murals*. Edited by Luis-Martín Lozano and Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera. Cologne: Taschen, pp. 26–131.
- Mello, Renato González. 2020. Prometheus Unbound: Orozco in Pomona. In *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945*. Edited by Barbara Haskell. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, pp. 172–79.
- Merrell, Eric. 2010. Siqueiros in Los Angeles and His Collaborations with the California Art Club. Available online: <https://ericmerrell.wordpress.com/2010/03/30/siqueiros-in-los-angeles-and-his-collaborations-with-the-california-art-club/> (accessed on 13 November 2024).
- Messinger, Lisa Mintz. 1997. Pollock Studies the Mexican Muralists and the Surrealists: Sketchbook III. In *The Jackson Pollock Sketchbooks in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, pp. 61–84.
- Messinger, Lisa Mintz. 2012. Pollock Studies the Mexican Muralists. In *Men of Fire: José Clemente Orozco and Jackson Pollock*. Edited by Mary K. Coffey. Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, pp. 37–48.
- Mumford, Lewis. 1934a. Mumford on Orozco (Watts Writes in Defiance, Mumford in Appreciation of Orozco). *Art Digest* 9: 10.
- Mumford, Lewis. 1934b. Orozco in New England. *The New Republic* 9: 231–35.
- Nadeau, Nils, ed. 2018. “Orozco at Dartmouth: The Epic of American Civilization” (Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth). Available online: https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/sites/hoodmuseum.prod/files/hoodmuseum/publications/2019_reprint_orozco_brochure_english_final.pdf (accessed on 14 November 2024).
- Naifeh, Steven, and Gregory White Smith. 1989. *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.
- Newman, Michael. 1979. *The Influence of Orozco, American Indian and Eskimo Art and Ideas from Ethnology on Jackson Pollock's Art*. Unpublished M.A. Report. London: University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, September.
- O'Connor, Francis V. 1967. The Genesis of Jackson Pollock: 1912–1943. *Artforum* 5: 16–23.
- O'Connor, Francis V. 1980. *Jackson Pollock: The Black Pourings, 1950–1953*. Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art.
- O'Connor, Francis V., and Eugene V. Thaw, eds. 1978. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*. 4 vols. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, A number following JPCR refers to the number designated to each of Pollock's works in this Catalogue Raisonné.
- O'Neill, H. R. 1934. Mr. Watt's Firecracker. *Art Digest* 9: 6, 21.
- Oles, James. 2022. Introduction. In *Diego Rivera's America*. Edited by James Oles. Oakland: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in Association with University of California Press, pp. 10–14.
- Polcari, Stephen. 1991. *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Polcari, Stephen. 2008a. La Recherche: Pollock et la renaissance de l'homme; Germination et naissance. In *Jackson Pollock et le Chamanisme*. Exhibition Catalogue. Paris: Pinacothèque de Paris, pp. 42–71.
- Polcari, Stephen. 2008b. L'Idée du Chamanisme de Jackson Pollock. In *Jackson Pollock et le Chamanisme*. Exhibition Catalogue. Paris: Pinacothèque de Paris, pp. 24–37.
- Polcari, Stephen. 2012. Orozco and Pollock: Epic Transfigurations. In *Men of Fire: José Clemente Orozco and Jackson Pollock*. Edited by Mary K. Coffey. Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, pp. 1–19, Originally published in *American Art* 6: 36–57.
- Polcari, Stephen, and Mickie Klein. 2008. Germination et naissance. In *Jackson Pollock et le Chamanisme*. Exhibition Catalogue. Paris: Pinacothèque de Paris, pp. 180–99.
- Pollock, Jackson, and Family. 2011. *American Letters 1927–1947*. New York: Polity Press.
- Potter, Jeffrey. 1985. *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Rampley, Matthew. 1996. Identity and difference: Jackson Pollock and the ideology of the drip. *Oxford Art Journal* 19: 83–94. [CrossRef]
- Rivera, Diego. 1926. *Mexican Folkways 1, No. 7*. Edited by Francis Toor. Art editor Diego Rivera. Mexico City: Mexican Folkways.
- Rivera, Diego. 1929. The Revolution in Painting. *Creative Art* 4: 28–30.

- Rivera, Diego. 1931. *Diego Rivera*. New York: Museum of Modern Art. Available online: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1979_300369443.pdf (accessed on 11 November 2024).
- Rivera, Diego, and Bertram D. Wolfe. 1938. *Portrait of Mexico*. New York: Covici-Friede.
- Rivera, Juan Rafael Coronel. 2018. Visions of the History of Mexico: Palacio Nacional and Palacio de Cortés, Mexico. In *Diego Rivera: The Complete Murals*. Edited by Benedikt Taschen. Los Angeles: Taschen America LLC.
- Roberts, Jennifer, and Harry Cooper. 2020. Chronology. In *Philip Guston Now*. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art.
- Rose, Bernice. 1967. *Jackson Pollock Works on Paper: Suggestions for a Chronology—An Annotated Worklist*. Qualifying Paper. New York: New York University.
- Rushing, W. Jackson. 1986. Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism. In *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*. Edited by Judi Freeman and Carel Blotkamp. Exhibition Catalogue. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. New York: Abbeville Publishers, pp. 273–96.
- Rushing, W. Jackson. 1995. *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Sandler, Irving. 1980. More on Rubin on Pollock. *Art in America* 68: 57, 59.
- Schapiro, Meyer. 1937. Nature of Abstract Art. *Marxist Quarterly* 1: 77–98.
- Schuessler, Michael K. 2020. Transcultural Modernists as Bicultural Bridges: Anita Brenner, Alma Reed, and Frances Toor. In *Vida Americana*. Edited by Barbara Haskell. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, pp. 196–201.
- Singer, Thomas. 2006. In the Footsteps: The Story of an Initiatory Drawing by Dr. Joseph Henderson. Available online: <https://aras.org/sites/default/files/docs/00038Singer.pdf> (accessed on 11 November 2024).
- Siqueiros, Alfonso. 1934. Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road. *New Masses* 11: 16–17.
- Snrech, Joanne, and Orane Stalpers, eds. 2024. *Jackson Pollock: Les Premières Années (1934–1947)*. Musée National Picasso-Paris. Paris: Flammarion.
- Solomon, Deborah. 1987. *Jackson Pollock: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Stevenson. 1889–1890. The Sia. *Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology of Smithsonian Institution* 11: 3–157.
- Storr, Robert. 1999. A Piece of the Action. In *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*. Edited by Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel. New York: Harry N. Abrams, pp. 33–69.
- Tate Gallery Entry. 1988. Jackson Pollock, *Birth*, c. 1941, T03979. In *The Tate Gallery 1984–1986: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions Including Supplement to Catalogue of Acquisitions 1984–1986*. London: Tate Gallery, pp. 245–51.
- Time Magazine. 1934. Art: Dead from the Dead. *Time Magazine*. September 17. Available online: <https://time.com/archive/6895210/art-dead-from-the-dead> (accessed on 18 November 2024).
- Varnedoe, Kirk. 1998. Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work. In *Jackson Pollock*. Edited by Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, pp. 15–85.
- Watts, Harvey Maitland. 1934. The Gulf Stream Myth and Its Relation to the Mild Climate of Europe. *The Art Digest* 8: 26.
- Wilhelm, Richard, trans. 1975. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*. Commentary by C. G. Jung. London: 1931. New York: Causeway Books.
- Wolfe, Bertram D. 1939. *Diego Rivera, His Life and Times*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Wolfe, Judith. 1972. Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock's Imagery. *Artforum* 11: 65–73. Available online: <https://www.artforum.com/features/jungian-aspects-of-jackson-pollocks-imagery-209943/> (accessed on 16 November 2024).
- Zamora, Rebecca. 2014. Shifra Goldman and David Alfaro Siqueiros's América Tropical. *Getty Research Journal* 6: 115–27. [CrossRef]
- Zimmer, Nina. 2016. Early Works: Between Primitivism and Picasso, C. G. Jung and Mexican Muralists. In *The Figurative Pollock*. Edited by Nina Zimmer. Basel: Kunstmuseum, pp. 95–102.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.