



AN ARTIST REVIEWS

# MURAL ART

Mural painting possesses particular qualities which distinguish it as a people's art. By virtue of being painted on walls rather than on expensive canvas, murals are more in touch with our everyday surroundings than with the elitist qualities associated with 'high' art. Mural artists have more in common with the working class than the individualistic and 'apolitical' artists who send their works to exhibitions in Chile.

Both the public nature of mural painting, as well as the large scale of the walls themselves, usually result in mural art being a collective effort. The style adopted by muralists the world over tends to be simplified and bold, resulting from the need to cover large areas of wall effectively. With its unfussy style, mural art can provide clearly defined models which possess educational and inspirational potential.

The revolutionary nature of mural painting has been recognised as a means of expressing the ideals and aspirations of people all over the world. Perhaps the best known muralists are those from Mexico. The placing of their art at the service of the people continues to inspire artists seeking to do relevant work. However, in South Africa the only mural painting to date has usually been in the form of graffiti, both progressive and reactionary. Recently artists either directly involved in or associated with the Community Arts Project in Woodstock have undertaken a mural project at Community House in Salt River. This building, housing several progressive organisations, has recently undergone renovation. Some of the potential of the mural has perhaps been lost in that it is situated in a narrow passageway inside the building. However, one can glimpse details of the work through some windows at the entrance of the building.

An attempt here has been made by the artists to represent different facets of the struggle. Urban and rural workers, students and mothers with children are juxtaposed against factories, trains, blocks of flats, shanties, windmills and mealies. The scale of the various images is distorted in order to integrate the multiple imagery in a dynamic way.

The main wall is directly opposed by a panel depicting a politician (whose head is the Voortrekker Monument), accompanied by a judge and rows of faceless, heavily guarded soldiers. Behind them a Casspir burns and crumbling parliament extends one of its columns towards us so that it suggests the barrel of a gun.

For the artist seeking to define a popular imagery, it is important that the model is specific to the struggle and avoids romantic stereotypes. The figures on the main wall are unified by their active participation in both the forging and raising of a large banner, symbol of the worker's aspirations. Victory over oppression is shown as an inevitable, though difficult task.

