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What is the role of artists/makers in achieving a Cultural renaissance in multi-ethnic nations?

Primarily, it is crucial to first define “Culture”. As maintained by the digital edition of the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Culture is “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Merriam-Webster, 2023) It is, however, one of six definitions under the entry. The framework with which “Culture” is outlined in this essay stems from a range of representation theories, and it defines culture both as common behaviours/practices of groups/societies, but also as a ‘processes of discovery and creativity’ (Meade et al., 2021, p.4). A Cultural renaissance is the rejuvenation of creation and consumption of arts. Characterised by artistic innovation and displays of cultural heritage, cultural renaissances have historically flourished under prosperous national conditions. As well as that, the nations were able to achieve a Cultural renaissance due to the hegemonic political and economical structures. As stated by Jonathan Joseph, a researcher of the Hegemony Theory, “dominant social groups achieve ruleship or leadership on the basis of attaining social cohesion and consensus.”

(Joseph, 2003). Having power, the dominating cultures have the opportunity to uphold and celebrate aspects of their cultures, such as heritage, tradition, history, values, even religion. Cultural erasure of minorities in such countries can exist without violence, as the dominating culture's values and traditions become the national norm and are implemented into all aspects of life. It is therefore important to examine multi-ethnic nations, as the upkeep of cultural heritage, and achieving a Cultural renaissance is significantly more difficult, but also significantly more important, as the cultural minorities don't have the same opportunities to restore and celebrate their culture as the ruling cultural majority. Through exploring already existing cases of cultural restoration and celebration as well as examining their effects, ranging from art movements to personal undertakings, tools which could be used to achieve a cultural renaissance are outlined. These tools; political activism, inclusion of symbolism/culture in one's personal practice, archival research and participation in art movements, can be implemented by artists/makers today. The current context of implementing these strategies is also critical to examine, as while exploring a range of different decades and even centuries, the artists/makers today have access to constantly evolving technology, which can be used alongside the above outlined tools for achieving a Cultural renaissance. The evaluation of implementing these advancements will finally aim to examine the role of artists/makers in achieving a Cultural Renaissance in multi-ethnic nations.

Cultural Renaissances were able to take place and gain traction from both the artists and audiences due to prosperous financial conditions of their places of origin. Widely recognisable and influential instances of a cultural renaissance across Europe, such as the Italian Renaissance(14th to 17th century) and Romanticism(18th to 19th century) both transpired under economic affluence and political stability. The Italian Renaissance was able to form as the merchants collected wealth and in turn supported the Italian economy, as well as the development of art, and in turn culture. This is evident as the emergence of renaissance was primarily cultivated in Northern Italy, where cities with an economic growth such as Florence, Venice and Milan were located (Hae-Yoon, J. 2007). Romanticism, whilst scrutinising the effects of the Industrial Revolution in its core values, was able to prosper due to the economic growth provided to Europe by the

revolution itself. Owning art (and in turn contributing to the creation and upkeep of culture) became a symbol of status, "One manifestation of the economic power of this new class was the creation of a new kind of space for the presentation and enjoyment of arts" (Bradley and Esche, 2007), and therefore proving that the introductory cultural renaissances were able to prosper on the national grounds of wealth and stability.

Understanding the idea of "Culture" is a difficult task for human comprehension, as outlined by a cultural theorist notable for his contributions in the field of representation theories, Stuart Hall. He outlined the different approaches in which it is interpreted, the anthropological and the sociological, to form a more understandable definition. Anthropologically, culture is the distinct behaviours of a group/society, while under a more sociological lens, culture can be defined as the common values and the coexistence of a group/society (Hall, 1997, p.2-15). This indefinite and broad definition creates multiple meanings of the word, reflecting the reason for the multitude of entries in the Merriam-Webster dictionary rather well. The struggle in defining culture has been interestingly outlined by researchers Rosie R. Meade and Mae Shaw, who stated the meaning of the word is "notoriously imprecise" as "Culture incorporates both 'ways of life'...and 'special processes of discovery and creativity'...but it also shades into other more fraught concepts such as 'ethnicity','race'..." (Meade et al., 2021, p.4). This proclamation coincides with Hall's definitions of culture, although adding onto the theory the discussion of arts and cultural practices. Both of these definitions will be utilised as a framework for understanding the idea of culture, and in turn the significance as well as necessity of Cultural renaissances outlined in this essay. This is due to the fact that culture in a sense of ethnicity/social group and culture in the meaning of discovery, creativity and arts. Through the creation of art and upkeep of traditional craft, artists have been able to preserve heritage and celebrate culture. With the application of Hall's anthropological definition of culture, the common values upheld in societies, which people are exposed to in both the primary and secondary stages of socialisation greatly affect their perception of the world across different cultures. The values, experiences and perceptions can even be subconscious. But these aspects carry themselves over into the work of artists/makers. Plato described arts as "representational, or mimetic

(sometimes translated “imitative”)” to the artist’s perception of the world around them (Adajian, 2018). Therefore culture and tradition is, even at a subconscious level, imbued into art/craft.

Achieving a cultural renaissance in multi-ethnic nations poses challenges due to their range of diversity. Preserving culture and tradition can be hindered due to potentially contrasting values, language and belief amongst the ethnic groups. These contrasts can also lead to conflict between different ethnic groups, leading to further difficulty in preserving and restoring culture.

The existence of multiple nations within a country also leads to the blending of their cultures. For instance, the migration of Jews to Poland in the eighteenth century saw “...the biggest Jewish population in Europe, about 10% of the entire Polish population”(Matynia, 1991, p. 24). As the people and cultures blended, Jewish people formed an identity as well as cultural and economic independence. Therefore in the Polish pursuit of culture and art during the partitions and international conflict, the culture of the Jewish people was also affected “...their fate in this land also constitutes the fate of the Polish nation.”(Rostworowski, 1991, p.7).

The dominating ethnic group dominates the values of national identity, however it is also crucial to examine countries affected by colonialism, as “The imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries.”(Solomos, 2022, intro.). The acquisition and colonisation of land alters national identity, being in effect long after the colonisers leave. Such countries are important to investigate, as despite the fact that the nationals are an ethnic majority, they are/were not the ruling power. “Colonies are controlled and protected by another country having political power.”(unacademy). Colonialist perspective even created a certain association between “culture” and “civilisation” in order to achieve a power structure in which the colonised lose their identity and culture. “‘Civilisation’, the noun, has invoked hierarchies of cultures” whilst ‘civilise’ truly connotes “cultures trampled underfoot” (Meade et al., 2021, p.4). Through a sociological lens however, rather than protecting the culture and tradition of the colonised, the colonisers have been

historically known to disrupt, disrespect and in some instances make effort to erase said culture. For instance, the craft of Native American beadwork went extinct due to colonisers. The craft itself held great cultural significance conveyed through the beads, which intricately created, symbolised tribal art, stories and folk tales. Through the course of colonisation however, changes to the materials were enforced, which hindered the purity of the beads and the beadwork itself. Moreover, the enforcement of a new, unfavourable economic system as well as cultural norms (and therefore customer demand) also contributed to the decline of the craft.

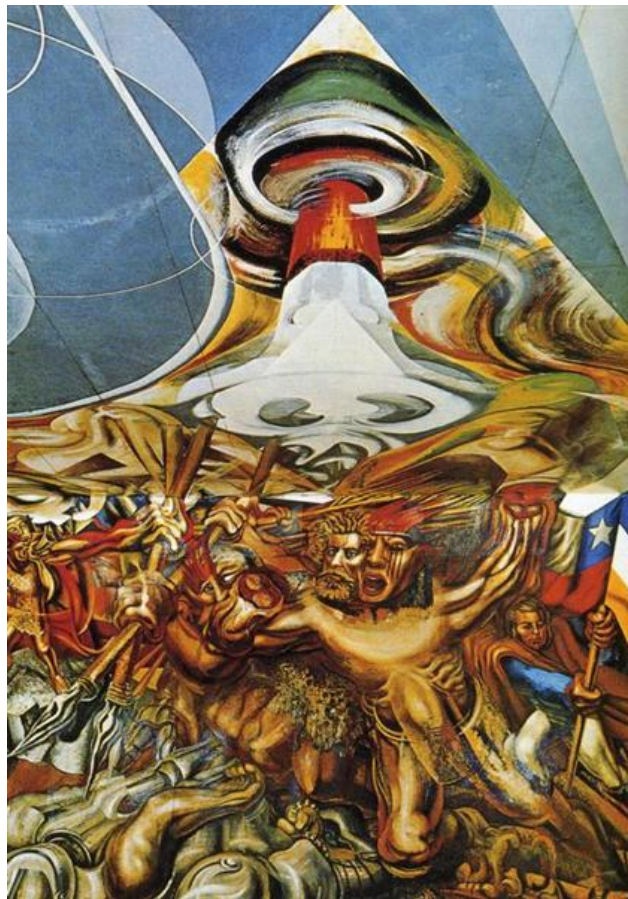


(Fig. 1, Unknown)

Therefore, while Native Americans were in fact, the Native population, were stripped of a multitude of elements of their culture through colonisation. Even a single glass bead piece could contain symbolism and representation of culture, which should have been reinforced and celebrated. The erasure of craft therefore contributed to the loss of culture greatly, as evident through the lens of post-colonialism. “The political conflicts that characterise multicultural societies can take on a very different aspect if they are understood to exist firmly in a context supplied by imperial and colonial history” (Gilroy, 1989). While hindering a nation’s ability to achieve and strive towards cultural

restoration and in turn a renaissance, due to changing the idea of national identity, displacement of nationals as well as not creating economic and political affluence, artists have expressed their experiences and perceptions of colonialism. This, on some scale, can in turn aid cultural restoration, aiming to preserve national identity.

David Alfaro Siqueiros is an artist assimilated with the Mexican Muralism movement, which explored the themes of social justice, political violence and preservation of Indigenous culture on a general scale. Siqueiros aimed to convey the physical, cultural as well as historical consequences of colonisation of the Indigenous people.



(Fig 2. Siqueiros, 1941-2)

In this mural, Siqueiros paints a landscape of violence and colonial oppression. The coloniser figure, appearing to have two heads, is Agustín de Iturbide, a prominent figure in the history of Mexico and its struggle for independence. Iturbide appears to have

distorted, somewhat satanic even features due to his betrayal of the cause of freedom, hence the two faces. The preservation of culture in multi-ethnic nations has been achieved in various ways which artists/makers should examine and implement into their practice. For instance, artists and art movements have advocated for historical and cultural education, as well as for policies protecting culture. Conveying political messages through artwork, artists have challenged and pushed for systemic change. Mexican muralism emerged in the early 20th century, after the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The revolution arose due to political, economic and social tensions, which didn't dematerialise after the formal ending of the conflict in 1920. As a response, Mexican muralism focused on conveying political views and stances of the people in Mexico, exploring themes of culture, nationality, the rich history of Mexico as well as social justice. The movement has preserved Mexican culture through advocating for freedom of expression, cultural education as well as its accessibility. An artist often credited for his contribution to the establishment of the movement, Diego Rivera created intricate murals advocating for social change and conveying frequently controversial political messages.



(Fig 3. Rivera,1940)

Created for the International Exposition in San Francisco, Rivera painted “Pan American Unity” to campaign for the solidarity between the American continents. Illustrating the social diversity and historically influential figures, the mural explores the interconnection between both continents. Featuring a historical range, from elements from pre-Columbian civilisations to then-current industrial scenes, Rivera conveys the shared heritage, and with that his vision of unity between the continents. Displaying the art, and in turn political messages, culture and heritage in public spaces ensured accessibility for viewers with a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, which could be accredited to the success of the painter. Connecting with a wide audience to advocate for social justice amplified change, inspiring President Roosevelt to start a creative program, providing jobs for over 5,000 American mural artists (Schoeneberger, 2006). Writing about cultural representation, Stuard Hall stated that "culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things- as a process, a set of practices"(Hall, 1997, p.2-15) , which is

a statement arguably embodied by the political body of art that Riviera produced. Pushing for social change, he undertook personal efforts in order to preserve and celebrate his culture, through his own set of artistic practices.

Another way in which artists/makers can aid in achieving a cultural renaissance is through celebrating and featuring their culture through their craft. This can be achieved through the inclusion of language, symbolism, traditional folk elements as well as preserving the methods and techniques used in their culture. A movement which strived for the preservation of cultural, traditional art and identity while using those elements that can be used as inspiration for artists seeking to achieve cultural renaissance on a personal scale is Young Poland. Young Poland (Młoda Polska) is...“a dynamic arts movement that sought to fuse the fine and decorative arts in proclaiming freedom of expression and the reassertion of national identity” (Szczerski & Griffin, 2020). In the year 1795, Poland disappeared from the map, only regaining its political identity as the “Polish Republic” on the maps in 1918. In the struggle of regaining independence over this time period, Poles were prohibited from speaking in their native language in 1863. This ban, as well as the violence and deportation faced by the citizens, saw the birth of an artistic resistance which aimed to preserve, express and further evolve the culture and identity of Poland. It saw an evolution of Polish cultural identity through embracing artistic innovation, taking inspiration from European cultural movements such as Art Nouveau, whilst preserving traditional elements. Jacek Malczewski, one of the movement’s most prolific artists, achieved a perfect combination of the both notions. His work heavily features history, folklore and mythology of Poland through the use of symbolism and using metaphorical, historical narrative.



(Fig. 4 Malczewski, 1914)

One of Malczewski's most recognisable and admired paintings, "Polonia" uses symbolism to create a narrative of displacement and sorrow experienced after Poland's multiple partitions. The female figure adorned in Polish folk attire symbolises Poland itself. The man, kneeling before her in agony represents the Polish diaspora, longing for Polish independence from beyond its borders. Understandably, this sentiment had to be hidden behind layers of symbolism, as expressing that statement audibly wouldn't be favourable to an artist/creator. However those who were able to understand the meaning were able to connect with an art form rich in cultural heritage and covert political messaging, and through viewing the art as an audience, increasing its demand, the rate of its creation increased to, leading to the production of even more elements of culture and heritage. Therefore the artists/makers and audiences alike were able to

cultivate these very sentiments, only hoping for the end of partitions, when the secret cultivation of culture could become its restoration and even celebration.

Yet another in which artists/makers have contributed to the restoration of culture and in turn have been contributing to the creation of a cultural renaissance is through utilising national, historical and cultural research. Implementing archival research into one's creative practice not only serves as a tool of education for the viewer, but can also directly work towards preserving traditional cultural motifs and practices. Leon Ferrari was an Argentinian artist with notable contributions in cultural preservation through utilising archival research in his work. In his series "Western Christian Civilisation", Ferrari criticises the social influence of nationwide Christian indoctrination, also examining its effects through society and history.



(Fig 5. Ferrari, 1965)

The work is juxtaposing religious iconography with symbols of violence and oppression, challenging involvement of the Church in the state. Conveying the notion that the Argentinian nation and therefore culture is deeply affected by the non-secular government, Ferrari's "The Western Christian Civilisation" points at the hypocrisy of the Church standing by the "unholy" acts of its government. While the piece may not outright convey any cultural symbolism or folk elements, it advocates for political change and against religious and political oppression, which not only educates the viewers on the socio-political background of Argentina, but also aims to liberate the culture, which in turn could allow for the restoration and celebration of culture.

Representing political messages and advocating for members of the Argentinian culture, Ferrari's work could have resonated with the people due to their connection with the culture, through the lens of Stuart Hall's representation theory, as "Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (Hall, 1997, p.2-15). D. Wood, a researcher of craft and design theories, urges artists/makers to "recognise and engage with the political agency of craft as a way of fabricating a new, sustainable modes of (human) being." (Wood, 2023, p.3-5). Léon Ferrari is a great example of an artist who did recognise the inherent political identity of craft to produce results not only new in style (anti-religious establishment art was not widely recognised and loved in 1960s Argentina), but also shared a new sentiment, opening the eyes of his audience to the violence and religious contradictions at the time. Therefore through the use of archival research, Léon Ferrari was able to cultivate and fight in an effort to restore cultural heritage on a scale mass enough to lead to a Cultural renaissance in post-colonial Argentina.

The above outlined practices, political activism, inclusion of symbolism/culture in one's personal practice, archival research as well even participation in art movements, are all tools which can be implemented by designers/makers today. Having discussed the ways in which different artists have utilised these tools in order to contribute to the archival of a cultural renaissance, there is an important factor to consider, the decades in which these artists used to fight to preserve their culture and traditions. In this generation, all these tools should be evaluated with the consideration and perhaps implementation of technology. Primarily however, it is crucial to review the effectiveness of the outlined tools. Through observing the model of Mexican Muralism and the work of Léon Ferrari, it is apparent that the tool of political activism has been used by both. While the use of political activism in order to aid the achievement of a Cultural renaissance by both parties was successful in preserving culture and heritage, it is important to consider the effectiveness of this model in today's world. The convergence of art and activism, as some have argued, is an intentional practice. "Aesthetics can be transformative and transgressive, 'defamiliarizing the world' and inventing a sense of new political and social possibilities." (Serafini, 2018). This can imply that aesthetics,

arts, and therefore their consumption can provide a new experience in how the audience as well as participants view issues raised by said art. Consuming activist and political content through arts, rather than through a more standardised medium such as a book or article is an entirely different experience, as the connection between the art and viewer is dissimilar to that of a viewer and written text. Due to aspects such as craftsmanship, colour usage and aesthetic, artists can invoke emotion in the audience in an entirely unique way, and “emotion modulates virtually every aspect of cognition...including perception, attention, learning, memory, reasoning, and problem solving.”(Tyng et al., 2017), therefore purposeful use of these elements in art can capture the audience and convey the political/activist messages effectively.

The inclusion of symbolism/cultural elements in one's personal practice has also been proven effective in the cultivation and restoration of culture. Reverting back to the Young Poland movement, it was arguably the combination of the European influences with localised, Polish symbolism which had created a movement/style unique enough for a large level of audience consumption and interest. Whilst the movement did not result in the dissolution of the partition, nor did it outright, openly carry such political sentiments, the hidden meanings and symbolism allowed the people to connect or even reconnect with their heritage, in a time where doing so openly was prohibited. “...there remains the sublimation of its life in writings and paintings- a spiritual heritage...”

(Rostworowski, 1991, p.7). There is a debate however, on how effective the restoration and celebration of culture can be in today's geopolitical state of the world. Due to cultural diffusion, cultural trends and traditions will not spread, but instead they will be confronted with barriers that will hinder their spread (Hann, 2018, p.4). Having discussed the challenges faced by ethnic minorities in their fight to preserve culture, this view should not be surprising to uphold, as the culture they fight to restore is likely to clash with the national values, which are determined by the majority/ societal group in power. Archival research, the third outlined tool has been branded as a practice which emphasises “intangible cultural heritage, the interdependence between the intangible, the oppression of ‘outsider groups’”(Moore-Cherry et al., 2017, preface). Its implementation in the practice of artists/makers aiming to aid in the creation of a Cultural renaissance in multi-ethnic nations would be beneficial for those exact reasons.

All of the artists and movements analysed in the paragraphs above have shared these sentiments through their art in some way. Mexican Muralism sharing ideologies of unity and anti-colonialism, Young Poland's intangible and concealed political meanings and symbols which became intangible with the art style itself, as well as Léon Ferrari's abstract expression of cultural heritage, are not all examples of the use of archival research. However, if the utilisation of archival research can create similar results, as argued by Moore-Cherry et al., it should be considered by artists/makers who aim to achieve these very results. The modern context of the artist/maker has to be additionally considered, as the advancements in technology make way for new opportunities, as well as concerns in application to the preservation and restoration of culture. In *At a Distance- Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, Norie Naumark argues that decades before the world wide web even became accessible, artists have sought and conceived imaginative uses for technology and its then-current as well as future advancements (Chandler et al., 2006, p.4). In current times, with technological advancements becoming more frequent and accessible, designers/makers have been applying them to art. The fields of graphic design, digital photography, 3d printing and digital illustration, as well as countless others, are a great example of utilising technology in art, all those fields having not only demand but popularity, influence and cultural importance. Utilising the digital evolution of technology in order to aid in achieving a Cultural renaissance may however present new challenges. For instance, some argue that the internet and its accessibility, while connecting artists and audiences around the world, upholds the barriers between the higher and lower classes, as well as between the East and West. "Internet technology has also supported the creation of new borders, such as virtual diasporic communities..." (Matten & Love, 2014, p.4) suggests that the post-colonial displacement of people and culture is evident and upheld by technology to this day. While giving artists new opportunities to display their work to a larger, global audience, even the algorithms on certain internet platforms which promote and advertise content have been proven to have a Euro-centric focus. Bias in predictive algorithms originates from feedback loops, and the data analysed can originate from biased sources/data collection method. "Such bias and potential discrimination may be developed or amplified over time, when data based on outputs of

algorithmic systems become the basis for updated algorithms” (FRA, 2022). This could mean that the artists/makers who try to display or promote their work online may be affected by a racial bias, especially if the content of the work doesn’t fit Euro-centric standards. Technology does however aid the users of archival research, not only offering more accessibility to archival content, but also creating new forms of it, such as "meta- archives, ethnographic fieldnotes, recorder and transcribed interviews, numerical datasets..." (Moore-Cherry et al., 2017, preface.), all of which could be easily found and in turn implemented by artists/makers today.

Having explored the relevance of Cultural renaissances, its results, benefits and importance on a cultural level, this essay arrives at the role of an artist/maker in its creation. Evidently, the restoration of culture and tradition is crucial to societies whose cultural identities are suffering from oppression and lack of cultural self expression or even celebration is essential for the survival of tradition and heritage. Whilst achieving a Cultural renaissance is impossible to do by a singular artist, contributing to it is something that artists/makers can do on a personal scale, implementing the tools of archival research, inclusion of symbolism and cultural motifs, as well as political activism through art. Jonathan Joseph, the previously mentioned researcher of the Hegemony Theory, argues that to achieve the cultivation of culture, and in turn cultural advancements in art, artists in multi-ethnic nations in which their culture isn’t the dominating culture should be fighting for rights and the preservation of their cultural practices and heritage. "...the task is not to try and 'create' some new form of art, but to create the necessary conditions for a new kind of art"(Joseph, 2003, p.1-67). This suggests that whilst before cultivating a personal practice of art/craft with aim to restore culture, fighting for rights to be able to display said culture is the priority in multi-ethnic nations without cultural democracy. “Cultural democracy” is the act of democratising access to "Culture" and "Arts" whereby institutions of art and culture, such as museums or galleries ensure to reflect the social diversity through their displayed art, as well as through the audience (Meade et al., 2021, p.4). In nations with cultural democracy, displaying, celebrating and cultivating cultural identity may be easier than in nations without, as it is financially and legally backed by the government. Reflecting back on the

postcolonial lens with which culture was investigated in the earlier paragraphs, artists/makers in nations with no “cultural democracy” due to the occupier, have less agency to cultivate and restore their cultural traditions and heritage, but the necessity to do so is even higher. While researching the historical context of Cultural renaissances, I was able to find a high quantity of content on the British arts and crafts movements as well as romanticism, but more importantly, that I was able to do so due to the wealth of archival research on the topics. “The full and varied reach of British art/craft during the renaissance has been made more available for exploration in its entirety due to online data-base cataloguing and bibliographic projects.” (Barker et al., 2013, intro.). While this isn’t entirely surprising, as the popularity of digital data-bases is growing, it can perhaps serve as a testament to the utility of archival research by artists/makers aiming to aid in achieving a Cultural renaissance. Having discussed the importance of achieving it, as well exploring the role of artists/makers in its creation, we arrive at the cumulative point of this research. Design's forms are in themselves political, as they are created with an ideological basis. For instance, the design elements of a school classroom serve as interior decoration, however also as tools to maximise efficiency and train the new generation of the workforce to work in an orderliness befitting the Capitalist system (Wood, 2023). If design and arts are therefore convergent with politics, I urge the current and future generations of artists/makers to utilise it, to fight for positive social change/justice, as well as preserve, restore and finally celebrate culture and heritage, on a scale mass enough to lead to a Cultural renaissance.

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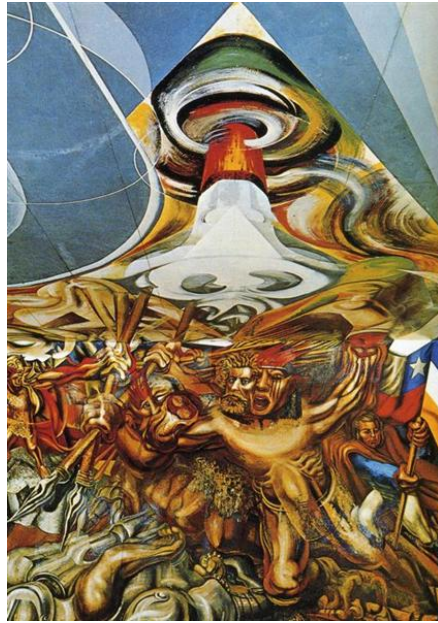


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Figure 5: Ferrari, L. (1965) 'La civilización occidental y cristiana (The Western Christian Civilization)'. Available at: <https://www.rencontres-arles.com/en/expositions/view/689/leon-ferrari>.

