



# **At the Crossroads: Diego Rivera and his Patrons at MoMA, Rockefeller Center, and the Palace of Fine Arts**

*Catha Paquette*

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Collaborations during the Great Depression between the Mexican artist and Communist activist Diego Rivera and institutions in the United States and Mexico were fraught with risk, as the artist occasionally deviated from course, serving and then subverting his patrons. Catha Paquette investigates controversies surrounding Rivera's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, his Rockefeller Center mural *Man at the Crossroads*, and the Mexican government's commissioning of its reconstruction at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. She proposes that both the artist and his patrons were using art for extraordinary purposes, leveraging clarity and ambiguity to weigh in on debates concerning labor policies and speech rights; relations between the United States, Mexico, and the Soviet Union; and the viability of capitalism, communism, and socialism. Rivera and his patrons' shared interest in images of labor—a targeted audience—made cooperative ventures possible.

In recounting Rivera's shifts in strategy from collaboration/exploitation to antagonism/conflict, Paquette highlights the extent to which the artist was responding to politico-economic developments and facilitating alignment/realignment among leftist groups for and against Stalin. Although the artwork that resulted from these instances of patronage had the potential to serve conflicting purposes, Rivera's images and the protests that followed the destruction of the Rockefeller Center mural were integral to a surge in oppositional expression that effected significant policy changes in the United States and Mexico.

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