

*Dreaming with His Eyes Open: The Life of Diego Rivera.* By PATRICK MARNHAM. New York: Knopf, 1998. Photographs. Plates. Appendixes. Notes on sources. Bibliography. Index. 350 pp. Cloth, \$35.00.

This book represents the first serious biography of the great Mexican muralist since Bertram Wolfe's 1963 classic, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*. Unlike Wolfe, Marnham does not attempt to cover every aspect of Rivera's life. Instead, he strives to create a highly readable and fast-paced account for the general reader who knows little about the dynamic world that whirled around the great painter.

What is most compelling about this book is Marnham's ability to reconstruct the various stages of Rivera's colorful life. For example, Marnham paints a vivid mural of his own in describing the Porfiriato, that painful yet transcendental epoch in Mexican history. Marnham's rich depiction of Rivera's early years reminds the reader that the Porfiriato was everything. Without it, there certainly would not have been a Rivera, nor an Orozco, nor a revolution, nor anything at all. Clearly, Rivera was a child of the Porfiriato whose subsequent life echoed back to patterns set in that time; although a leftist and a revolutionary, Rivera was a controversial artist who often wandered far and wide from his political beliefs. He regularly accepted commissions from counterrevolutionary figures; an early benefactor was Governor Teodoro Dehesa of Veracruz, a *porfirista* opportunist who profited from the informal slave trade based in the Valle Nacional, where the Díaz regime sent its criminals, vagrants, and political opponents. Later Rivera cavorted with the Fords and Rockefellers, the twin dynasties of American capitalism, who awarded him sumptuous walls in Detroit and New York. Accepting such patronage earned Rivera the ire of Siqueiros and other revolutionaries and led to his exclusion from the Mexican Communist party. Thus Rivera's life as a painter and political activist was, Marnham explains, complex and often confused. And Marnham explains why: art was his first love, and those around him—fellow revolutionaries and family members alike—were secondary.

Marnham shines in his reconstruction of Rivera's European years, which is wanting in Wolfe's book. The author guides the reader through the wild and dizzying world of bohemian Paris, which soared and ultimately crashed during the Great War. Here the reader meets Rivera's friends and rivals: Apollinaire, Mondigliani, Picasso, Ehrenburg. Marnham also recounts the hedonistic activities of the period: orgies, binges of food and drink, and lengthy talks of art and the *avant garde* in restaurants, bars, and the dank, flea-infested studios of Montparnasse. Surprisingly, Rivera partakes but does not indulge. He remains, according to Marnham, the most "disciplined and continent" spirit of the bunch, who, despite two short affairs (one of which produces a child), preferred a largely monogamous life with his Russian-born wife, Angelina Beloff, a painter and his intellectual equal. Eventually, consumed by nostalgia and a growing dissatisfaction with his progress as an artist, Rivera tired of Europe and defected to Mexico in 1921, leaving Beloff, a daughter, and European modernism in the lurch.

According to Marnham, Rivera's return to Mexico did not automatically signal his coming of age. The catalyst came in the failure of his first mural, the *Creation*, which he painted in the National Preparatory School in 1923. Although remarkable, the mural taught Rivera a stern lesson: never paint the ideas of someone else, in this case the arcane classicism of José Vasconcelos, the minister of public education who single-handedly engendered the muralist movement in Revolutionary Mexico. Eventually, Rivera traveled south to *México indígena*—Tehuantepec and Yucatán—where he found his calling as a revolutionary and indigenista painter. Fortunately, neither Vasconcelos nor subsequent officials would stand in the way. The period between 1923 and 1933 was the most productive of Rivera's life. Here, Marnham provides a creative and convincing analysis of Rivera's murals in Mexico, California, and Detroit. He also describes how certain aspects of Rivera's personal and political life manifest themselves in his art.

The only major flaw in Marnham's book is that the reader never really gets to know Rivera, the man. We learn that Rivera was here, there, and everywhere, but we come away ever so mystified by him. In this sense, Wolfe remains unsurpassed. Perhaps Marnham should have followed lead of Hayden Herrera, the biographer of Frida Kahlo, who incorporated many rich excerpts from Kahlo's memoirs and letters. We must remember that Rivera was the greatest of storytellers. Yet we are treated to none of his fables, but rather cautious paraphrasings of them. Marnham's reluctance to imbibe in Rivera's words reflects an uneasiness with Rivera's autobiography, which the author described as "flawed." But how can Rivera's autobiography be flawed? Rivera was ever the prankster who delighted at concocting plausible ruses meant to tease, irk, and shock his victims. Although Wolfe may have been carried away by Rivera's fables, Marnham may have sacrificed too much for the sake of objectivity.

There are a couple of minor lapses. Marnham refers to the royal family of nineteenth-century Spain as "Habsburgs." They were Bourbons. Marnham also cites Angelina Beloff's *Memoirs*, which appeared in 1986. Yet he fails to place this invaluable source in the "Select Bibliography" at the back of the book.

Despite these distractions and the author's intriguing reluctance to revive Rivera's personality through word, Marnham has painted us a picture of Diego Rivera's world with broad strokes. The result is a fascinating and engaging work that will remain a fundamental text for anyone interested in this giant of twentieth-century art. Clearly, Marnham's book will force readers to think long and hard about Rivera and his work. In doing so they will never again look at a Rivera mural the same way.

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