

An Artist between Spain and America

The Commitment of Painter José Luis “Pasajes” to Art during the Republic and Franquism

Un artista entre España y América

El pintor José Luis “Pasajes” y su compromiso con el arte durante la República y el franquismo

LIDIA BOCANEGRA BARBECHO*

YOLANDA GUASCH MARÍ**

CHIARA OLIVIERI***

ABSTRACT This article analyzes the life, exile, and artistic work of the republican painter José Luis Fernández Martínez (also known as Sarralde-“Pasajes” painter) under the republican government and the ensuing Franco regime. Enlisted as a volunteer in the Army of the Republic, he worked in the Culture Section of the General War Commissariat

* <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9479-5921>
Universidad de Granada, Departamento de Historia Contemporánea
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Campus de Cartuja, Granada, Andalucía, España
lbocanegra@ugr.es

** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9447-065X>
Universidad de Granada, Departamento de Historia del Arte
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Campus de Cartuja, Granada, Andalucía, España
yguasch@ugr.es

*** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1482-3748>
Universidad de Granada, Departamento de Historia Contemporánea
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Campus de Cartuja, Granada, Andalucía, España
olivieric@ugr.es

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alongside other artists. He survived the victors by masking his past during the postwar period and facing the ravages of a Spain shrouded in darkness during the early years of Franco's rule. He was lucky enough to embark on an early journey to America, in 1945, and brave enough, in the face of Franco's government, to make friends with Republican exiles in Mexico. There, he married and raised a family. Since then and for long years he resided between the two shores. His brush portrayed illustrious characters from the field of culture and politics during the Republican government, the Franco regime, and the Republic of Mexico; but also other Republican exiles or characters related to the cause in America. Through his art, he demonstrated a unique ability to bridge two starkly contrasting worlds.

KEYWORDS José Luis "Pasajes", Spanish Civil War, Republican Exile

RESUMEN El artículo analiza la vida, el exilio y la obra artística del pintor republicano José Luis Fernández Martínez (pintor Sarralde- "Pasajes") bajo el gobierno republicano y el sucesivo régimen franquista. Alistado como voluntario en el ejército de la República, fue afectado en la Sección de Cultura del Comisariado General de Guerra trabajando codo a codo con otros artistas; sobrevivió a los vencedores enmascarando su pasado durante la posguerra y haciendo frente a los estragos de una España ennegrecida durante la etapa del primer franquismo. Tuvo la suerte de viajar a América muy pronto, en 1945, y la osadía, de cara al gobierno franquista, de entablar amistad con exiliados republicanos en México, en donde se casó y formó familia. Desde entonces y durante largos años residió entre las dos orillas. Su pincel retrató a ilustres personajes del ámbito de la cultura y política durante el gobierno republicano, el régimen franquista y la república de México; pero también aquellos otros exiliados republicanos o personajes afines a la causa en América. Fue único en conectar uno y otro mundo, tan distintos, gracias a su arte.

PALABRAS CLAVES José Luis "Pasajes", Guerra Civil española, exilio republicano

INTRODUCTION

This text analyzes the life and work of the painter José Luis Fernández Martínez, also known as Pintor Sarralde. Its central aim is to make known the life story of this artist by connecting his trajectory to his artistic production and the impact it had on the Spanish and American societies of the time.

The exile of Spanish intellectuals and artists during the Civil War left an indelible mark on their work, as many of them found in their situation as exiles the inspiration to create new works. In some cases, exile became a fundamental experience in the lives of these intellectuals and artists, transforming their vision of the world and their way of working. For example, the poet Luis Cernuda, who went into exile in England, found in exile a space to reflect on his own identity and to create poetry that focused on themes such as nostalgia and the desire to return to Spain.

Exile also had an impact on the way these intellectuals and artists related to the cultural world of their country of origin. Many of them continued to publish works that dealt with political and social issues, but from the perspective of their new life experience. In some cases, exiles created new art forms, that were a reflection of their experience in exile, such as the work of Spanish painters exiled in Mexico (CABAÑAS, 2018), like José Luis “Pasajes”, analyzed extensively in this article.

José Luis Fernández Martínez is a clear example of how the war and post-war period affected the work and lives of Spanish intellectuals and artists. Likewise, his experience in his pseudo-exile in Mexico had a significant impact on his work, leading him to experiment with new techniques and forms of artistic expression. Through his work, “Pasajes” explored Mexican identity and culture, as well as his own identity as a Spanish exile/immigrant.

Historiography and cultural studies have brought a new perspective to the study of exile by focusing on individual experiences and how these are reflected in culture and society. Our analysis is a clear example, but so are other case studies such as that of the artist José Renau and

the work he executed during his exile in Mexico (PÉREZ AGUIRRE, 2019), or those with a gender perspective focused on analyzing Spanish women exiled in Mexico, as well as their descendants, in the art scene (GUASCH MARÍ, 2022).

The research hypotheses of this article can be summarized as follows:

1) The work of José Luis “Pasajes” was influenced by the different political and cultural contexts in which he lived, both in Spain and in America. During his time in the Sección de Cultura del Comisariado General de Guerra [Cultural Section of the General Commissariat of War], he worked in collaboration with other artists, which had an impact on his style and technique. In addition, his exile in Mexico and his contact with other Republican exiles and local artists also had an effect on his work and the way he represented themes related to politics and culture.

2) The figure of José Luis “Pasajes” was characterized by a constant commitment to the defense of republican values and his opposition to the Franco regime. Despite the difficulties he faced during the post-war period and in Franco’s Spain, his artistic work and cultural activity were always in line with his political commitment. In addition, his trip to America and his contact with other Republican exiles and local artists in Mexico reinforced his ideological stance and led him to portray many relevant figures in the field of Republican culture and politics.

3) The life and work of José Luis “Pasajes” demonstrate the ability of art to connect different cultures as well as political and social contexts. Despite the differences between Spain and America, and the political and social difficulties he faced during his lifetime, his art was able to transcend borders and connect with diverse audiences. His work portrayed both relevant cultural and political figures in Spain and Republican exiles in America, which shows his commitment to the defense of Republican values and his ability to connect different political and cultural realities through art.

At the methodological level, this research has been carried out as follows: it was based on the information obtained through the *e-xiliad@s*

research project,¹ through which most of the analyzed sources were gathered. This data was contrasted with the information obtained through a series of interviews with Juan Fernández, son of the painter, who contacted one of the authors to share his father's biography, within the framework of the aforementioned research project.

Historical research is fundamental to understand and contextualize the work of artists and their role in society. In the case of painter José Luis Fernández Martínez, the exploration of historical archives is essential to understand his career and his experience in exile. However, the oral source represented by his son, who provides a more personal and closer perspective, is a valuable contribution to the research and allows us to learn about aspects of the artist's life that might otherwise have been forgotten. The use of oral sources in historical research is becoming increasingly common and necessary, as it provides a more complete and deeper understanding of historical processes. After all, oral history was born as a complement to historical science without aiming to replace documentary sources. Oral history nuances facts and actions through what people say and how they say it, bathed with that patina of feelings and imagination that shape a certain historical fact (SMITH, 2017); we refer to that worldview that any testimony offers (PERKS; THOMSON, 2015). Why is it complementary? As David Mariezkurrena Iturmendi (2008, p. 230) indicates, it is because oral testimonies transmit something that is not found in written documentation, that "direct and personal contact with an individual or a human group that remembers the past, their past, and brings a human dimension to History".² And yes, the memory of the informants is not infallible since, as this same author points out,

1 The *e-xiliad@s* initiative is a research project based on collecting unpublished international sources about anonymous Republican exiles; funded on a couple of occasions by the Ministry of Labor and Immigration (Ref. 12/2009) and the Ministry of Employment and Social Security (Ref. 20/2011) of the Spanish government, through the General Directorate of Migration. *Proyecto e-xiliad@s*. Available at: <https://www.exiliadosrepublicanos.info/>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

2 Freely translated: "contacto directo y personal con un individuo o un grupo humano que recuerda el pasado, su pasado, y aporta una dimensión humana a la Historia".

it is itself historical, the present shades the past, the selection of memories exists, and we generally hide more or less unconsciously what alters the image we make of ourselves and our social group. Therefore, there are no “false” oral sources. Wrong statements constitute psychologically certain truths³ (MARIEZKURRENA ITURMENDI, 2008, p. 230).

Returning to our study, documents and pictorial works were added to the oral sources, which were contrasted with personal digital and physical archives – among which the personal archive of Juan Fernández stands out – and institutional archives – among which the following stand out: Archivo del Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica [Historical Memory Documentary Center Archives]; Archivo General de la Nación de México [General Archives of the Nation of Mexico]; Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España [Historical Archives of the Communist Party of Spain]; Archivo Histórico Nacional [National Historical Archives]; Colección Digital Complutense [Complutense Digital Collection]; Fondos de la Biblioteca del Museo del Prado [Holdings of the Library of the Prado Museum]. The archival research, therefore, is carried out in both countries of residence of the painter Sarralde.

Historical Contextualization

The 1930s, which began politically with the proclamation of the Second Republic and in which our painter José Luis Fernández also started his political career, opened a new period for all the protagonists of the cultural panorama. During this period, as Jaime Brihuega (2002, p. 15) points out, “substantial, effective, and progressive transformations in many areas of culture linked, for various reasons, to the public

3 Freely translated: “ella misma es histórica, el presente matiza el pasado, la selección de los recuerdos existe y generalmente ocultamos más o menos inconscientemente lo que altera la imagen que nos hacemos de nosotros mismos y de nuestro grupo social. Por ello, no hay fuentes orales ‘falsas’. Las afirmaciones equivocadas constituyen verdades psicológicamente ciertas”.

authorities”⁴ will take place. In this sense, many initiatives were launched in these years prior to the outbreak of the conflict and generated a cultural boom, initiated in the preceding years, which would lead to the arrival of new artistic languages, the multiplicity of literary magazines, the emergence of initiatives such as the Misiones Pedagógicas [Pedagogical Missions], the birth of the Agrupación de Artistas Plásticos [Association of Visual Artists], with its various denominations. It also meant the re-foundation of spaces that had disappeared, but of vital importance, such as the Sociedad de Artistas Ibéricos [Society of Iberian Artists] (SAI), which had been created in 1925. As some authors indicate, the cultural project promoted by the Republican government was, apparently, influenced by the Mexican one since both countries shared the goal of eradicating illiteracy in rural areas, or else that of integrating all citizens into a new nationalist discourse through cultural and pedagogical missions (PÉREZ AGUIRRE, 2019, p. 113).

Without delving into the pictorial peculiarities of the main artistic centers of the time, Madrid and Barcelona, we would like to point out that San Sebastian, the city where our artist received his first formal artistic teachings, came to surpass the city of Bilbao (GONZALEZ DE DURANA, 2002, p. 51). In fact, in 1931 San Sebastian was chosen to hold an exhibition of the aforementioned SAI, which would only sponsor one more in Valencia and others abroad, in Copenhagen and Berlin.⁵

The outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936 was a turning point in the recent history of Spain; it plunged the country for three years in an armed conflict whose most direct consequences were the triumph of the coup of the so-called nationalists and the exile of all those who had supported, to varying degrees, the legality of the Republic. However, despite the adverse conditions, art, far from disappearing, became

4 Freely translated: “transformaciones sustanciales, eficaces y progresistas en muchos ámbitos de la cultura vinculada, por diversos motivos, a los poderes públicos”.

5 About SAI, see: LA SOCIEDAD de Artistas Ibéricos y el arte español de 1925. In: *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*. Available at: <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/exposiciones/sociedad-artistas-ibericos-arte-espanol-1925>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

another weapon in the conflict, being used from opposing positions where drawing and engraving were “two of the preferred techniques of both sides”⁶ (PÉREZ SEGURA, 2012, p. 314). Together with them, as Facundo Tomás (2006, p. 64-65) indicates, the posters of the war “were an iconic expression of the collective combat, of its reasons and objectives; they constituted the manifestation of the ideals of justice and freedom”, but also, as the author indicates, the posters acted as a system of education of the multitude, “effective instruments for the processing of slogans to all corners and, for each individual militant, an element of identification with the own organization, of which they appeared as symbols”⁷.

Within trade unions, artistic associations, or magazines, many of which were born during the war, artists developed an important cultural propaganda work that was also deployed from the official sectors, such as the Propaganda Section of the Ministry of Public Instruction. In fact, this Ministry developed an intense activity that had as its high point the organization of the Spanish Pavilion at the International Exposition of Paris in 1937 (BRIHUEGA, 2002, p. 25).

The end of the war led to the departure of many of the artists who had committed themselves to the defense of the legality of the Republic, although others, as in the case discussed here, remained in adverse circumstances, joining the lists of those shot and, with more luck, those imprisoned in concentration camps,⁸ or in Franco’s prisons, which were scattered throughout the Spanish geography. Surviving the atrocities experienced in these spaces of repression was already a heroic deed, the same as restarting their lives in a harsh post-war period marked by autarchy and by a censorship “that acted as if the country was still at war”⁹ (ECHEVARRÍA, 2016, p. 207).

6 Freely translated: “dos de las técnicas preferidas de ambos bandos”.

7 Freely translated: “fueron expresión icónica del combate colectivo, de sus razones y objetivos, constituyeron la manifestación de los ideales de justicia y libertad”; “instrumentos eficaces para la tramitación de consignas a todos los rincones y, para cada militante individual, un elemento de identificación con la propia organización, de la cual aparecían como símbolos”.

8 On Francoist concentration camps, see: Hernández de Miguel (2019); Agramunt Lacruz (2005).

9 Freely translated: “que actuaba como si el país todavía estuviera en guerra”.

During the 1940s, cultural purges were among the measures taken at the end of the war. Censorship was imposed upon the visual arts, although with less intensity than that which controlled the press, radio, or cinema. In this scenario, artists who did not manage to go into exile chose different paths for surviving. Some dissociated themselves from artistic creation, as in the case of the Sevillian sculptor Antonio Perea Sánchez, and those who kept producing art did so under pseudonyms, as José Luis Fernández would do, or with activities totally opposed to what they had been doing before and during the war.

In any case, and despite the fact that the great waves of exiles occurred throughout the conflict and massively during 1939, the difficult political, economic, and social conditions of Spain pushed some artists to leave throughout the 1940s and 1950s, asphyxiated by that oppressive scenario. This happened to the painter we are studying, even if he only left for certain periods, to Mexico. Additional examples are found in names such as the engraver María Teresa Toral or Giménez Cacho.

PRE-WAR BIOGRAPHY

On May 28, 1917, José Luis Fernández Martínez was born in Puerto de Pasai Antxo (Pasajes Ancho), province of Guipúzcoa, his parents being José Fernández Grados and Feliciano Martínez Sarralde. Throughout his life he would adopt a series of artistic names such as Pintor Sarralde, during the Spanish Civil War, or José Luis Fernández de “Pasajes” during the post-war period,¹⁰ to finally sign as José Luis “Pasajes”, or simply “Pasajes”, towards the end of his artistic career.

In 1929, when he was only 12 years old, his father sent him to study in a boarding school in France, specifically in the city of Dax, located in the Aquitaine region, possibly the École Primaire Supérieure Professionnelle. His sister Águeda Pía also studied there in the girls’

¹⁰ ARCHIVO PERSONAL DE JUAN FERNÁNDEZ (APJF), Mexico City. *Declaración Jurada de José Luis Fernández Martínez ante el juez D. Gabriel Rullán Ballester, firmado en el Juzgado Municipal de Palma de Mallorca, 25 Apr. 1944.*

section (Collège de Jeunes Filles), both were boarded there for 2 years (FERNÁNDEZ, 1999, p. 18). According to the memories in José Luis' family, it was in Dax that Fernández discovered his facet as a painter when he made a color drawing in the recovery room where he was being treated for a sore throat.¹¹

From then on, he decided to concentrate on painting and enrolled in 1931 at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios [School of Arts and Crafts]¹² in Donostia (San Sebastian), where his parents had moved shortly after José Luis was born. There he studied artistic drawing from 1931 to 1932 with the teachers Gaspar Montes Iturroz and Rogelio Gordón García-Rovés. Both were very well-known Basque painters, Gordón also being the director of the School.¹³ During this time and when he was approximately 15 years old, José Luis came into contact with the Basque painter Elías Salaverría Inchaurrendieta,¹⁴ a friend of his father José Fernández Grados, who at that time was a writer and with whom he obtained advice and teachings in relation to painting, in the studio that Elías had in the village of Pasajes San Juan.

In 1933, when he was only 16 years old, José Luis moved to Madrid and entered, with the support of the academicians Elías Salaverría and Enrique Martínez Cubells,¹⁵ two places that consolidated him as

11 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019. The interviewee is the son of José Luis Fernández.

12 At this school José Luis studied artistic drawing (first and second year) and English language (first year). APJE, Mexico City. *Certificado de la Escuela de Artes y Oficios de San Sebastián, firmado por el Secretario y Profesor emérito Luis Ormaechea Lizaso, emitido en San Sebastián*, 29 May 1943.

13 GORDÓN GARCÍA-ROVÉS, Rogelio. In: *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao*. Available at: <https://arteder.museobilbao.com/ms-opac//permalink/3@000000251>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

14 Elías Salaverría was born in Guipuzkoa in 1883 and died in Madrid in 1952; he was a student at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios. Much of his youth as an artist was financed by the Marquis of Cuba. He studied in Paris where he was artistically influenced by the painter Millet. MADARIAGA, Luis de. Salaverría Inchaurrendieta, Elías. In: *Enciclopedia Auñamendi*. Available at: <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/es/salaverria-inchaurrendieta-elias/ar-120266/>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

15 Enrique Martínez-Cubells y Ruiz Diosayuda was born in Madrid in 1874 and died in Malaga in 1947. Besides having his father, also a painter, as a teacher at the beginning of his artistic stage,

a painter: the Escuela Central de Bellas Artes [Central School of Fine Arts] of the Academia de San Fernando [Academy of San Fernando], where he studied the art of oil painting. In turn, he worked in the Museo del Prado [Prado Museum] as a copyist for the period from 1933 to 1936. At the Museo del Prado he was a copyist of Velázquez, Murillo and Goya. The latter's pictorial style was the one that most influenced José Luis' painting. Among the Prado Museum's books of copyists, José Luis appears as copyist of the following works and years: *La Cometa* [*The Kite*] (1933), *El Ciego de la Guitarra* [*The Blind Guitar Player*] (1933), *La Era* [*The Threshing Floor*] (1934), *La Nevada* [*The Snowstorm*] (1934) by Francisco de Goya; *Retrato de Felipe IV* [*Portrait of Felipe IV*] (1936) and *Las Lanzas* [*The Surrender of Breda*] (1936) by Diego de Velázquez; *Concepción* [*Immaculate Conception*] (1936) by Bartolomé Esteban de Murillo.¹⁶ In 1935 there is no record of José Luis as a copyist in the Museo del Prado, which was likely due to his participation, that same year, in the XI Exposición de Artistas Noveles [XI Exhibition of New Artists]. Barely 18 years old at the time, he exhibited a series of works and obtained a monetary prize of one hundred and fifty pesetas.¹⁷ Possibly, this competition forced him to work and travel for some months in San Sebastian. In June 1936, shortly before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, José Luis exhibited his painting titled *La herrería de Atocha* [*The Blacksmith Shop of Atocha*] at the Exposición Nacional de Bellas

Enrique studied at the Escuela Especial de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado de Madrid [Special School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving of Madrid]. Part of his artistic work is influenced by German modern art as a result of his trip through Europe in 1898. B.B.A.. Martínez-Cubells y Ruiz Diosayuda, Enrique. In: *Enciclopedia del Museo del Prado*. Available at: <https://www.museodelprado.es/aprende/enciclopedia/voz/martinezcubells-y-ruiz-diosayuda-enrique/57039ca1-8532-4b55-af20-f0854c4f6f7d>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

16 BIBLIOTECA DEL MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO (BMNP), Madrid. *Índice de pintores copiados*, 1933. 42 p. Sign. L53, p. 18; p. 25. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/XEZpNs>; 1934. 38 p. Sign. L54, p. 13; p. 15. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/VEZaO1>; 1935. 58 p. Sign. L17, p. 39; p. 40. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/QEZsH0>; 1935-1936. 55 p. Sign. L55. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/7EZsgv>. All pages were accessed on: 26 Apr. 2023.

17 APJF, Mexico City. *Certificado emitido por la Secretaría de la Diputación de Guipúzcoa y firmada por el secretario y abogado D. Mariano Ciriquían Gaiztarro*, 28 May 1943.

Artes [National Exhibition of Fine Arts], held at the Palacio de Exposiciones del Parque del Retiro [Exhibition Palace of the Retiro Park] in Madrid. Unfortunately, the award ceremony could not be concluded due to the outbreak of the civil war.

Figure 1: *La herrería de Atocha*



Oil on canvas, 1932. Author: José Luis Fernández Martínez.

THE ARTIST AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

When the Spanish Civil War began in July 1936, José Luis was only 19 years old and was in Madrid finishing his painting studies. It should be noted that José Luis' parents, especially his father, were liberals who instilled in their five children a spirit of free thought and religious freedom. With the triumph of the Government of the Republic in 1931, the

whole family had already leaned towards this political regime, although they did not join any party. These political convictions of the family, together with those of the young artist himself, led José Luis to volunteer for the Republican cause as soon as the war broke out.¹⁸

Just before the beginning of the war, José Luis' family, parents and four siblings (Miguel, Agueda, Isabel and David), had moved from the city of San Sebastian to settle in Madrid. They moved because his father, the writer José Fernández, was appointed Artistic Director of the record company Columbia-Regal;¹⁹ unfortunately, in November 1936, the company ceased to operate in Spain due to the war. This fact generated a difficult economic situation for the family, causing José Luis' father to put himself at the service of the Government of the Republic, developing communications activities, a domain in which he had acquired several years of experience in his previous job. Thus, he was appointed Postmaster²⁰ in the city of Tarragona, in Catalonia; at that time the family had to be divided: the father stayed in Tarragona while his wife, Feliciana Martínez, and three of his five children went, for security reasons, to the city of Valencia. His other two sons, Miguel Ángel and José Luis himself, volunteered for the Republican cause.

18 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

19 The businessman Juan Inurrieta established in 1923 in Donostia-San Sebastian the industrial company Columbia Graphophone Company, S.A.. It was a subsidiary of the American record company, publishing its records under the Columbia and Regal labels. It had branches in Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, and Seville; its advertising was present in many newspapers and magazines. Due to several legal problems, in 1935 Juan Inurrieta changed the name of the company to Fábrica de Discos Columbia, S.A. (BILBAO SALSIDUA, 2016, p. 11).

20 José Fernández Grados belonged to the Sindicato Español de Carteros [Spanish Postmen's Union]. CENTRO DOCUMENTAL DE LA MEMORIA HISTÓRICA (CDMH), Salamanca. *Ficha de José Fernández Grados, 1937-1977*. Signatura DNSD-SECRETARIA,FICHERO, 19,F0064986. Available at: <http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/10332973>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

Culture Section of the General Commissariat of War

The young men recruited by the Republican Government were assigned by age, occupation, and aptitudes to different activities related to the armed conflict. José Luis was therefore assigned to the Sección de Cultura del Comisariado General de Guerra del III Cuerpo de Ejército de la República Española [Culture Section of the General Commissariat of War of the III Army Corps of the Spanish Republic]. The III Cuerpo de Ejército was created on March 4, 1937, and belonged to the Ejército del Centro [Army of the Center]. This military unit organized a cultural system adapted to the structure of the army and comprising an Army Corps Culture Section, Divisional Sections of culture and Combatant's Homes, whose work revolved around the fight against illiteracy, cultural exchange, the organization of libraries, and the creation of schools, among others (FERNÁNDEZ SORIA, 2007, p. 103), working side by side with the Milicias de la Cultura [Militias of Culture]. Thus, in Chinchón, 40 km from Madrid, the Sección de Cultura was installed. The painting workshop was located there, and in it José Luis produced different artistic works, from portraits to political posters and war propaganda. Many of these paintings were destined to different localities and fronts in charge of the III Cuerpo de Ejército. Others had Madrid as their final destination.

Figure 2: Headquarters of the General Commissariat of War, Cultural Section of the III Army Corps



Chinchón, Madrid, between 1936 and 1939. Source: ARCHIVO HISTÓRICO DEL PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE ESPAÑA (AHPCE), Madrid. Sección Archivo Fotográfico, subsección Guerra Civil, serie Propaganda, Colección Digital Complutense. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/800010.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

The painters who worked in the Sección de Cultura established in Chinchón had, in turn, discipline and military rank; they were officers who depended directly on the Comisario General [General Commissary].²¹ During the armed conflict José Luis obtained the military rank of Ensign and used the artistic pseudonym of Sarralde, which was his mother's second surname. When he was questioned about not having participated directly in the battle fronts, during and after the civil

21 The commissars of the III Cuerpo de Ejército were Francisco Antón Sanz, of the PCE; Francisco Ortega Jiménez, of the PCE; Alfonso Reyes, of Izquierda Republicana [Republican Left] and Antonio Romero Cebrián. ÍNDICE del III Cuerpo de Ejército de la República. In: *Combatientes.es*. Available at: <https://www.combatientes.es/indiceIIIcuerpodeejercito.htm>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023. See also: Engel Masoliver (2005).

war, he always said that his weapon was the paintbrush and his shield the palette and that war was fought with ideas expressed through art. He often quoted the phrase attributed to Vladimir Lenin about ideas being more lethal than cannons.²²

Figure 3: The Painter Sarralde at the Headquarters of the Propaganda Commissariat



Chinchón, Madrid, between 1936 and 1939. Source: AHPCE, Madrid. Sección Archivo Fotográfico, subsección Guerra Civil, serie Propaganda, Colección Digital Complutense. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/90005.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

The General Commissariat of the III Cuerpo de Ejército based in Chinchón was in charge of, among others, the Sección de Cultura and that of Propaganda, closely related due to the artistic works that were carried out in both. Thus, the Sección de Cultura was located in a large house in the town, and the painting workshop was installed in its courtyard. Nearby was the Sección de Propaganda, where the painter “Pasajes” also carried out various activities.

22 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

Figure 4: Painters' Room of the Propaganda Commissariat of Chinchón, Madrid



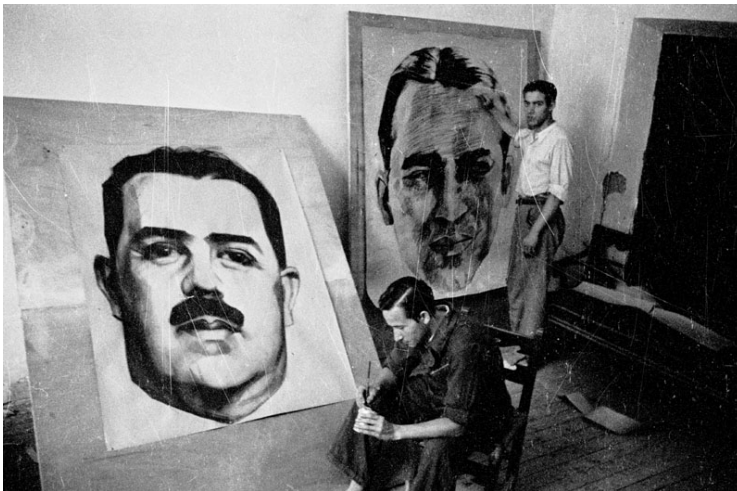
The painter Sarralde standing in front of the portrait of Lenin, sometime between 1936 and 1939. Source: AHPCE, Madrid. Sección Archivo Fotográfico, subsección Guerra Civil, serie Propaganda, Colección Digital Complutense. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/900015.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

According to José Luis' family memory, the political commissary sent to Madrid some of the portraits of the different Spanish Republican leaders and other international leaders that had been made in the painting workshop under his orders. Chinchón's Sección de Cultura was commissioned to paint three emblematic, large-format portraits. These had to be painted in sections, so that they could be transported to the capital. The first portrait was of Manuel Azaña, president of the Spanish Republic; the second was of General Lázaro Cárdenas, president of Mexico; and the third was of Joseph Stalin, head of the Soviet Union. Both Cárdenas and Stalin represented the international leaders who at the time had been most supportive of the Spanish Republic.²³ As

23 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

can be seen in the photographic archives of the Partido Comunista,²⁴ José Luis portrayed Lenin and Francisco Antón Sanz (secretary of the Madrid Provincial Committee of the Partido Comunista); while Lázaro Cárdenas was portrayed by one of his comrades. The photographs of the Cultural Section were taken by the photojournalist Walter Reuter, who also went into exile in Mexico, where he met and became friends, years later, with the painter José Luis. After his death, his daughter organized an exhibition of these and other photographs by Reuter in Mexico.²⁵

Figure 5: Painters Making Portraits of Republican Leaders, One of Them Antón, at the Propaganda Commissariat of Chinchón, Madrid

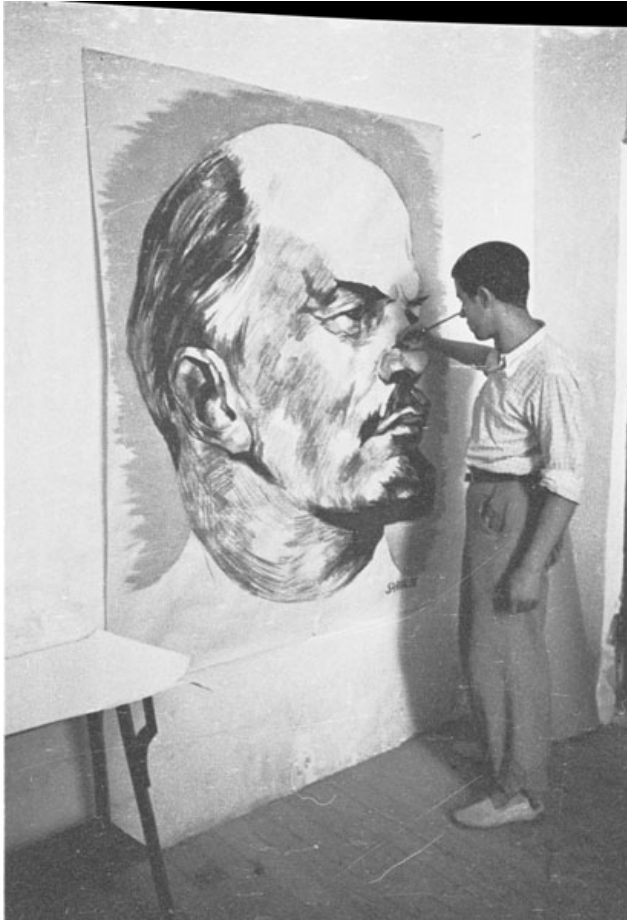


The painter Sarralde is standing painting the portrait of Francisco Antón, between 1936 and 1939. Source: AHPCE, Madrid. Sección: Archivo Fotográfico; Subsección: Guerra Civil; Serie: Propaganda. Colección Digital Complutense. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/900022.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

24 AHPCE, Madrid. *Retratos de Lenin y Francisco Antón Sanz*, [193-]. In: *Colección Digital Complutense*. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/900023.jpg>; <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/900015.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

25 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

Figure 6: Artist Sarralde Retouches a Poster with Lenin's Effigy at the Propaganda Commissariat in Chinchón, Madrid



Date: Between 1936 and 1939. Source: AHPCE, Madrid. Sección: Archivo Fotográfico; Subsección: Guerra Civil; Serie: Propaganda. Colección Digital Complutense. Available at: <http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/visualizador/frameset.htm?http://alfama.sim.ucm.es/greco/GuerraCivil/900021.jpg>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

When in mid-November 1938 the news reached Chinchón that the Republican Army had been defeated by Franco's troops in the Battle of the Ebro, and in view of the imminent fall of Madrid, the Sección Cultural and, in general, the Comisariado de Guerra of the III Cuerpo de

Ejército were dismantled. The political commissary, surnamed Ortega, offered José Luis, and possibly also the rest of the artists, a safe-conduct to leave Chinchón and go through the zone that was still Republican to the city of Valencia, with the purpose of fleeing. We are at a time when the Nationalist advance had divided the Republican zone in two. The rest of Luis' family was in Catalonia; there was news of the impossibility of reaching that area by land as a result of the recent offensive of the Nationalist rebels, who had cut off communication between Valencia and Tarragona since May 1938. In this difficult situation, José Luis considered going to Valencia or the port of Alicante, and then going to France or to another place outside Spain by sea.²⁶

It should be noted that, in November 1938, José Luis' father continued working for the Government of the Republic in the city of Tarragona. Shortly before the Republican territory was divided in two, he had moved his wife and his two youngest children from Valencia to Tarragona. Águeda, José Luis' sister, who had stayed in Valencia working as a pro-Republican journalist, managed to reach Barcelona. Miguel Ángel, his other brother, who at the beginning of the civil war enlisted as a volunteer defending the front of the Ciudad Universitaria [University City] in Madrid, and who had made a military career in the Escuela de Oficiales [School of Officers] during the war, at that time was leading the retreat from the Battle of the Ebro. In that battle he had participated as a captain in command of a machine gun battalion attached to the Brigadas Internacionales [International Brigades].

Finally, José Luis decided not to leave Chinchón. We do not know to what extent José Luis was aware of the harsh repression that the Nationalist army was inflicting on the defeated; in any case, his decision to remain in Chinchón demonstrates his political commitment to the government of the Republic, accepting any consequences.

Towards the end of March 1939, the civilian population of Chinchón became aware of the existence of a certain nervousness in the commanding

26 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

officers of the Estado Mayor [General Staff] and of the command posts located in the town. On the 28th the population took to the streets, seconded by some militia supporters, organizing a demonstration that ended at the Town Hall where a bicolor flag was placed, a flag that had been made and embroidered clandestinely by some women of the town (MEDINA PINTADO, 2007, p. 192). Between February and March 1939 two mayors succeeded each other in Chinchón: Vidal Roldán and Rafael Díaz. On March 29, 1939, a few days before the end of the war, the Spanish troops of Franco's army finally arrived in Chinchón and in the course of the following weeks more arrests took place, among which were those of other members of the Comisariado General de Guerra, members of the Partido Comunista, of the Comité del Front Popular [Popular Front Committee] and union leaders. As local history comments, Chinchón went from being Republican to being Francoist without firing a single shot. Even before April 1 it had a constituted municipal corporation, whose president was Enrique Recas Catalán (MEDINA PINTADO, 2007, p. 193).

José Luis was also arrested and sent to an internment camp in Guipúzcoa where he performed forced labor in the area of Peñas de Aya.²⁷ In that place the Batallones Disciplinarios de Soldados Trabajadores [Disciplinary Battalions of Working Soldiers] operated, sweeping the land and performing other types of work (MENDIOLA GONZALO; BEAUMONT ESANDI, 2006, p. 23). José Luis was possibly enrolled in one of these battalions for a year and a half until he was released at the end of 1940. He returned to civilian life and later to the artistic life he had before the war, but with an indelible mark that the armed conflict had left on him and the rest of his family forever.

What happened to his family? His parents and three of his siblings, faced with the incessant bombing of the city of Tarragona and later on Barcelona, where they lived for a very short time, managed to cross the border into France. His sister Agueda was the first to leave for exile and embarked on the ship Mexique bound for the Port of

27 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

Veracruz, arriving in Mexico in July 1939. His brother Miguel, after spending some time in extremely precarious conditions in the French concentration camp of Argelès-sur-Mer, also went into exile in Mexico in 1940. Miguel's initial destination was not Mexico; he embarked on a ship called Cuba from France to the Dominican Republic, but, due to the fact that the authorities of that island, with Leonidas Trujillo as president, did not allow the Spanish Republicans to disembark, the Mexican government, under the orders of General Lázaro Cárdenas, chartered a ship called Saint Domingue that brought that group of Republicans to the Port of Coatzacoalcos in Mexico.²⁸

However, José Luis' parents and his other two younger siblings, Isabel and David, being already in French territory and with possibilities of embarking to Mexico, did not do so. According to family memory, this was because his father was an idealist and did not want exile for himself or his family; he decided to return almost immediately to Spain with his wife and two younger children.²⁹ This fact was very common in the history of Republican exile; towards mid-late 1939 a large number of exiles returned to Spain: about 268,000 of them, mostly civilians and ex-combatants not particularly involved in political causes (BAUTISTA VILAR, 2009, p. 72). Very often, they were persuaded by the French government, who urged the exiles to repatriate under the conviction that there would be no Francoist reprisals or under threat, in the case of men, to enlist in the Foreign Labor Companies (CTE) or in the Foreign Legion or the Foreign Volunteers Marching Regiments (RMVE). The reality was quite different. An important part of the group of exiles who returned were not aware of having political or military responsibilities, nor did they know what awaited many of them: Franco's concentration camps, courts martial, political-social investigations, and purges (VILANOVA, 2009, p. 18). Once José Luis' family entered Spanish

28 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

29 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

territory, his father was arrested because of his record in the service of the Republic. He remained in prison for three years. At that time, his mother returned with her two younger children to live in the Basque Country, following the prevailing trend amid first-generation exiled women who returned to their places of origin in the period between 1939 and 1940 (ESCOBAR DERAS; BOCANEGRA BARBECHO, 2020, p. 297).

EARLY FRANCOISM: A REINTEGRATED PAINTER

Once he was released from the concentration camp at the end of 1940, José Luis tried to rebuild his artistic life by adopting, this time, the pseudonym of Fernández de “Pasajes”, which allowed him, among other things, to continue his artistic career in post-war Spain.

Between 1941 and 1942, while in Madrid, José Luis had as a guide and advisor for his artistic career the famous Basque painter Ignacio Zuloaga Zabaleta,³⁰ who at that time had his painting studio in the Spanish capital. Ignacio authorized him to copy two of his best known paintings, *Torerillos* [*Bullfighters*] and the *Retrato de Juan Sebastián Delcano* [*Portrait of Juan Sebastián Delcano*].³¹ In 1942, when he was barely 25 years old, José Luis painted in the Pyrenees mountains the landscape titled *Peñas de Aya*, obtaining first place in the XII Exposición de Artistas Noveles [XII Exhibition of New Artists], held in the city of Donostia/San Sebastian. He received a prize consisting of an economic pension of 3,850 pesetas from the Diputación de Guipúzcoa [Provincial Council of

30 Ignacio Zuloaga was born in Eibar on July 26, 1870, and died in Madrid in 1945. In his beginnings as an artist, he worked as a copyist at the Prado Museum; after long travels in Europe (Rome, Paris, London) he established himself as a highly recognized painter. ZULOAGA ZABALETA, Ignacio. In: *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao*. Available at: <https://arteder.museobilbao.com/ms-opac/permalink/3@000000597>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

31 APJF, Mexico City. *Autorización escrita y firmada por Ignacio Zuloaga*, undated.

Guipúzcoa].³² The renowned painter Ignacio Zuloaga and the architect Pedro Muguruza had been jurors of the contest.³³

José Luis' artistic talent continued to receive awards; on June 21, 1943, while residing in San Sebastián, he was granted a scholarship from the Fundación Conde de Cartagena of the Real Academia Española de Bellas Artes de San Fernando through a competitive examination.³⁴ This scholarship consisted of an economic fund of 8,000 pesetas that was given to him so that, for one year, he could carry out his artistic work in the cities of Granada and Palma de Mallorca.³⁵ José Luis therefore spent six months in each location, painting a large number of landscapes and exhibiting his paintings in several group shows.³⁶ In Granada he stayed at the old Convent of San Francisco, which at that time had become the Alhambra painters' residence.³⁷ Elsewhere, in December 1944 José Luis

32 APJE, Mexico City. *Certificado emitido por la Secretaría de la Diputación de Guipúzcoa, firmado por el secretario y abogado D. Mariano Ciriquíán Gaiztarro*, 28 May 1943.

33 Pedro Muguruza was an architect from Guipuzcoa. He was born in Elgoibar in 1893 and died in Madrid in 1952. After studying architecture in Madrid, he entered the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in 1938 and the following year was appointed director general of architecture. The monumental work that made him most famous was the Pantheon and Basilica of the Valley of the Fallen in the crag of La Nava in the Sierra de Guadarrama. AUNAMENDI ENTZIKLOPEDIA. Muguruza Otaño, Pedro. In: *Enciclopedia Auñamendi*. Available at: <http://aunamendi.eusko-ikaskuntza.eus/es/muguruza-otano-pedro/ar-82656/>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

34 Due to his republican past, in order to participate in this competition José Luis had to request a couple of certificates of no criminal record and good conduct. To this effect, he was issued a certificate signed by Juan Romero Aguilar, head of the Registro Central de Penados y Rebeldes, Ministerio de Justicia, Dirección General de Prisiones [Central Registry of Convicts and Rebels, Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Prisons], dated May 25, 1943. And a second certificate of good conduct signed by Ramiro García García, first class agent of the Cuerpo General de Policía [General Police Corps] and secretary of the police station, and by Félix Andrade Orejuela in his capacity as commissioner and interim chief, dated June 2, 1943. Both documents are stored in APJE, Mexico City.

35 In Palma de Mallorca he painted in a figurative-impressionist style *La Celda de Chopin* [Chopin's Cell] directly in the room of the monastery where the Polish musician spent a period of rest.

36 APJE, Mexico City. *Memoria de la beca firmada por José Luis Fernández de "Pasajes"*, 6 Nov. 1944. Academia de Bellas Artes, Registro de entrada n. 125.

37 APJE, Mexico City. *Certificado de residencia emitido por el secretario del excmo. Ayuntamiento de Granada, D. Cipriano Herrero Asenjo*, 20 Oct. 1943; *Expediente de Becario de la real Academia de Bellas Artes*, 21 June 1943.

exhibited his landscape *Legazpi* at the Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes [National Exhibition of Fine Arts] in Barcelona, obtaining the prize from the hands of the mayor of that city, Miguel Mateu y Pla.³⁸ The painting was later acquired by the Museo de Arte Moderno [Museum of Modern Art] of Barcelona. The awards continued: on June 13, 1952, in a public and solemn session held in Madrid, at the headquarters of the Real Academia de San Fernando, José Luis was awarded the Medalla Conde de Cartagena,³⁹ which was given to him retroactively as the winner of the scholarship competition in 1943.

From Sarralde painter during the war to Fernández de “Pasajes” in the post-war period; José Luis was a very talented young man, with several distinctions and recognitions. Family memory tells that, in a painting contest held at the Palacio de Exposiciones del Parque del Retiro in Madrid, in the 1940s, the painter Fernández de “Pasajes” was personally greeted and congratulated by General Francisco Franco who, as a rule, had no clemency towards his enemies.⁴⁰ In fact, the Francoist authorities, according to the family memory, never knew that the painter Sarralde and Fernández de “Pasajes” were the same person, thus ignoring his Republican political background. Receiving distinctions from institutions and members of the fascist regime and having had to alternate and portray on occasions people related to that movement did not entail a change in José Luis’ ideology or way of thinking. He always kept his Republican ideals, especially his anti-monarchist leanings, remaining very close to the communist ideology until the end of his days.⁴¹

38 APJF, Mexico City. *Diploma de la Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes de Barcelona*, 1944.

39 APJF, Mexico City. *Medalla Conde de Cartagena*, 13 June 1952.

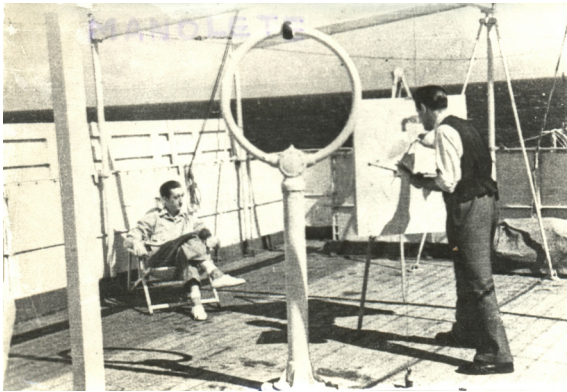
40 Regarding General Franco’s greeting, perhaps the family memory refers to the 1945 Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes held at the Palacio de Exposiciones del Parque del Retiro in Madrid, where José Luis exhibited the composition *Radioescuchas* [Radio Listeners], oil on canvas. MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN NACIONAL; DIRECCIÓN GENERAL DE BELLAS ARTES. *Catálogo oficial de la Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes de 1945*. Madrid: Blass, 1945, p. 67. Available at: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/191680>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

41 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author’s archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

BETWEEN SPAIN AND AMERICA: CONTACT WITH EXILE

While in Spain José Luis was reaping success, part of his family was still exiled in Mexico, and he had not seen them since the war broke out. Therefore, he began the procedures to travel to Mexico and reunite with his family. In order to expedite the entry procedures to Mexico, José Luis obtained a visa for one year through the Mexican consulate in Lisbon, Portugal, on October 15, 1945, as a political asylum seeker immigrant.⁴² He sailed to America from the port of Lisbon in October 1945, stopping in New York, where he stayed for a short time, painting landscapes and compositions. It was on that first trip to America, aboard the steamship *Marqués de Comillas*, that he met the bullfighter Manolete and painted an oil portrait of him posing on the deck of the ship.

Figure 7: José Luis Portraying the bullfighter Manolete on the Deck of the Vapor *Marqués de Comillas* Sailing the Atlantic Ocean



Source: AJPF, Mexico City, 1945.

42 ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LA NACIÓN DE MÉXICO (AGN), Mexico City. *Visado de entrada a México de José Luis Fernández Martínez*, 15 Oct. 1945. Consulado de México en Lisboa, Servicio de Migración, cónsul Emmanuel Fernández, n. 555026. Fondo Secretaría de Gobernación de México, cód. ES.28005.AGA, sig. AGA, RIEM,080,013. See: *PARES: Portal de Archivos Españoles. Movimientos Migratorios Iberoamericanos*. Available at: <https://pares.mcu.es/MovimientosMigratorios/>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

Figure 8: José Luis Painting in New York



Source: AJPF, Mexico City, 1945.

José Luis was 28 years old when he arrived in Mexico City on December 12, 1945, after having previously been in New York. Since that first visit, José Luis lived between Mexico and Spain, making uninterrupted trips between these two countries for the next 42 years, always keeping his Spanish nationality and establishing his residence in both places. During these trips he had the opportunity to meet his future wife, Carmen Corro. They married in Mexico City in 1955 and had five children together.

A few years after his first trips to Mexico, he quickly became acquainted with the local intellectual and artistic milieu. In 1946, José Luis painted a life portrait of the Basque-born businessman Ángel Urraza Saracho, then president of the Sociedad de Beneficencia Española [Spanish Charity Society] in Mexico. It was Ángel himself who commissioned

José Luis to paint a fresco mural: *Fundadores de Hospitales* [Founders of Hospitals] for the Sociedad de Beneficencia. Unfortunately, Ángel Urraza died before the mural was finished, and another Spanish businessman, Santiago Galas, became president of the society. José Luis did not have a very good relationship with the new president, due to his opposition to the appointment of a republican painter with leftist ideas. Tensions between the two continued; in a clear outburst, José Luis decided to portray himself in the mural; this caused even more discontent. After several disputes and threats by the board of directors of the society to destroy the mural and terminate the contract, an agreement was reached: finally, José Luis acquiesced to erase his face and finish the mural. During these disputes, José Luis initiated a legal and artistic rights protection lawsuit against the Society, with the support of Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the latter a friend of the painter because of his affinity with the Spanish Republican cause; he also received the support of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes [National Institute of Fine Arts] and its then director Carlos Chávez. As a consequence of the controversy generated by the mural painting and given the impossibility of erasing or destroying it, in 1948 the board of directors decided to cover the work painted by José Luis, covering the mural with a canvas, a copy of the painting *La Peña de Horeb* [The Rock of Horeb] by Murillo; therefore, the mural *Fundadores de Hospitales* painted by José Luis “Pasajes” has remained covered for almost seventy years.⁴³

His contacts with high Mexican personalities continued, and so did his artistic works. In 1948, José Luis portrayed the magistrate Salvador Urbina y Frías, president of the Supreme Court of Justice of Mexico. In 1949, invited by his friend the painter Josep Bardasano,⁴⁴ a

43 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

44 Josep Bardasano Baos was born in Madrid in 1910 and died in the same city in 1979. In 1922 he entered as a student in section IX of the Escuela de Artes y Oficios de Madrid [School of Arts and Crafts of Madrid], where by 1925 he would obtain all the extraordinary prizes of the career. After a series of trips around Europe in 1935, when the Civil War broke out, he actively participated in propagandistic sections of the Republican side through

Republican exile in Mexico, he joined the *Círculo de Bellas Artes de México* [Mexico's Fine Arts Circle], an association founded by Bardasano himself together with several exiled Spanish Republican painters. Photographs are preserved of Josep Luis painting the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacán, the court of the Mayan ball game in Chichén Itzá, among others. In relation to Mexico City, between 1957 and 1958, José Luis made a collection consisting of 87 landscapes of different facets of the Mexican capital, of which 60 are oil paintings and the rest are sketches and drawings. The following oil paintings stand out: *Ángel de la Independencia* [*Angel of Independence*] and *Diana Cazadora* [*Diana the Huntress*] (on the Paseo de la Reforma), *Monumento a la Revolución* [*Monument to the Revolution*] (in the Plaza de la República), *Hospital e Iglesia de Jesús* [*Hospital and Church of Jesus*]. All these works formed the collection *Un Retrato de la Ciudad de México* [*A Portrait of Mexico City*] and was presented at the city's Galería de Artes Plásticas [Gallery of Fine Arts] from November 18, 1958, to January 7, 1959.⁴⁵ José Luis had his painting studio on Palma Norte Street, in the heart of the historic center, and later on Bucareli Street.

In addition to Mexico, José Luis made constant trips to different cities in Europe (Rome, Venice, Paris, London) and the Americas (Caracas, Washington, San Francisco), where he worked on his painting and became closely involved with the people, in order to learn about the customs of the places and to create his compositions, landscapes, and portraits.

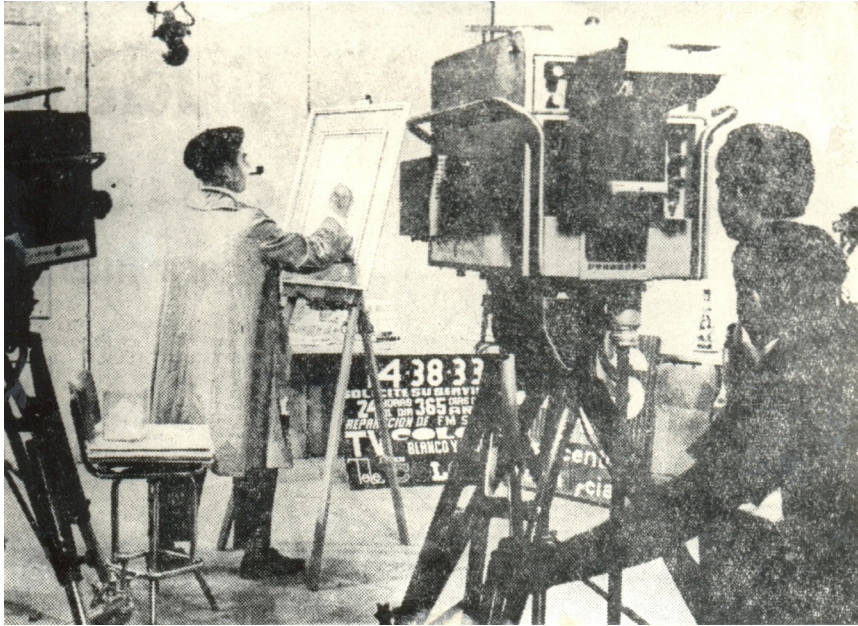
the workshop La Gallofa, of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas [Unified Socialist Youth], which he founded and directed, being recognized since then as one of the best and most prolific poster artists. In 1939, when the war ended and after passing through the French concentration camp of Argelès, he went into exile with his family in Mexico, where in the following years he developed an intense work through numerous exhibitions, collaborations in magazines, and teaching painting classes. There he founded, in 1945, together with other Spanish and Mexican painters, the *Círculo de Bellas Artes de México*, which he would eventually preside over. S. B. I. Bardasano Baos, José. In: *Enciclopedia del Museo del Prado*. Available at: <https://www.museodelprado.es/aprende/enciclopedia/voz/bardasano-baos-jose/77be8e1f-b5ab-4e96-90bd-6f3d11abeab3>. Access on: 26 Apr. 2023.

45 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author's archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019.

In 1949, José Luis' parents and his sister Isabel went to live in Mexico. The latter soon relocated to Venezuela. The youngest of his brothers always remained in Spain, in the city of Bilbao. Therefore, the family, which had given itself unreservedly to the Republican cause, would never again be completely reunited since that sudden separation in November 1936.

In 1960, José Luis added to his profession as a painter the facet of actor by initiating a new pictorial modality: that of painter-actor. The technique consisted of memorizing the faces of famous people and portraying them in crayon or pencil on paper in three or four minutes on a 40 x 50 cm, or even 90 x 140 cm canvas. Among the celebrities that José Luis had memorized for his shows were the faces of characters such as Francisco de Goya, Diego Rivera, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, León Felipe, Agustín Lara, George Washington, John F. Kennedy, Sigmund Freud, Juan Sebastián Elcano, Confucius, Cleopatra, Beethoven, Chopin and the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli, among others. At the same time that "Pasajes" made the portrait from memory, a recording was played with the biography of the sketched character and allusive music in the background. The biographies were written and narrated by José Luis himself and when the character to be portrayed was a poet, he recited the poems. He called the show *Recital de Dibujo* [*Drawing Recital*]. In order to exercise his profession as a painter-actor, he became a member of the Asociación Nacional de Actores de México [National Association of Actors of Mexico] (ANDA) and in Spain of the Agrupación Nacional Sindical de Bellas Artes [National Union of Fine Arts] (ANSIBA).

Figure 9: Painter José Luis Fernández During a Broadcast of the Television Program *El Club del Hogar*



The show was hosted by Daniel Pérez Arcaráz and transmitted by Televisa from Mexico City. Source: AJPF, Mexico City, [197-].

The Hundred Faces of León Felipe

José Luis “Pasajes” and the poet León Felipe were friends for many years. Their friendship started during the first trips that the painter made to Mexico and was gradually consolidated, remaining intact until the poet’s death in 1968.

Several groups of Spanish Republicans organized their get-togethers in various cafés in Mexico City, where José Luis and León Felipe would often meet, usually at the Café Sorrento, located in the historic center of the city, which later disappeared as a result of the 1985 earthquake that shook the Mexican capital. Both León Felipe and José Luis were bohemian by nature. On some Sundays, the painter would accompany the poet to Chapultepec Forest in Mexico City, where León Felipe would enjoy reciting

his poems to the people with his loudspeaker, among which he would declaim *El Gran Cambalache* [*The Great Exchange*] (FELIPE, 2008, p. 583).

In November 1969, on the first anniversary of León Felipe's death, José Luis paid him a great tribute by inaugurating an exhibition titled *Las Cien Caras de León Felipe* [*The Hundred Faces of León Felipe*], held at the Museo de la Ciudad de México [Museum of Mexico City]. The exhibition comprised one hundred drawings of different faces of the poet, some of which had been made during his lifetime, including a portrait drawn on a napkin while they chatted and discussed their countless topics at a literary gathering led by León Felipe.

Figure 10: José Luis "Pasajes" at the Opening of his Exhibition *Las Cien Caras de León Felipe*



The oil portrait of the poet in the background was commissioned by Mrs. María Esther Zuno, wife of the then president-elect of Mexico, Luis Echeverría Álvarez. Museo de la Ciudad de México, November 1969. APJE, Ciudad de México.

Figure 11: Five Portraits Presented in the Exhibition



Pencil on paper. Source: APJF, Ciudad de México.

Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros⁴⁶ wrote the following comment about the exhibition of the painter “Pasajes”: “León Felipe, Mexican Spanish in the full breadth of the terms, donated to his refuge land the highest tower of Hispanic and international literature. The hundred effigies in the drawings of José Luis ‘Pasajes’ seal the spirits of our

46 David A. Siqueiros (Chihuahua, 1896 – Mexico City, 1974) was a painter, theorist, and political activist. As a delegate of the Mexican Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios [League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists] (LEAR) he participated in the Congreso de Escritores Antifascistas [Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers] held in Valencia in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, enlisting in the Ejército Popular [Popular Army] where he reached the rank of lieutenant colonel; hence the nickname “El Coronelazo” with which he signs some of his works. Once the Civil War ended, he returned to Mexico where he painted a mural, *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, in the Sindicato Nacional de Electricistas [National Electricians Union], together with some Republican exiled artists: Josep Renau, Miguel Prieto, and Antonio Rodríguez Luna (GONZÁLEZ MADRID, 2000, p. 5).

two homelands”⁴⁷ It should be noted that Siqueiros had participated in the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer in the Republican ranks; he was a staunch militant of the Partido Comunista Mexicano and one of the first artists that José Luis met, in 1947, when he made his second trip to Mexico; he was also the one who defended the painter “Pasajes” in the latter’s litigation with the Sociedad de Beneficencia Española de México, while he was painting a mural in that institution. José Luis portrayed him on several occasions throughout his life and in one of the portraits he painted of him in pencil on paper in 1972, Siqueiros wrote the following: “Pasajes and I fought together in the military ranks of the Spanish Republic. Mexico, April 22, 1972”⁴⁸

His friendship with the poet León Felipe was intense; on one occasion Felipe wrote to him in a dedication:

Pasajes. You are a great man, a great artist, and an erratic being that no one will stop. I want to be your friend because men like you, who go over things and never stop, this is what I would have liked to be. I embrace you with my heart.⁴⁹

For several years after the poet’s death, and on the anniversaries of his death, José Luis would visit León Felipe’s tomb. On his tombstone, he even painted the poet’s face in oils, according to the painter’s family memory.

47 FERNÁNDEZ, Juan. Interviewer: Lidia Bocanegra Barbecho. Author’s archives, video conference interview, 7 June 2019. Freely translated: “León Felipe, Español Mexicano en toda la amplitud de los términos, le donó a su tierra refugio, la más alta torre de la literatura hispana e internacional. El centenar de efigies de los dibujos de José Luis ‘Pasajes’ sellan los espíritus de nuestras dos patrias”.

48 APJF, Mexico City. *Mensaje de David Alfaro Siqueiros en retrato en lápiz*, 22 Apr. 1972. Freely translated: “Pasajes y yo luchamos juntos en las filas militares de la República Española. México, 22 de abril de 1972”.

49 APJF, Mexico City. *Dedicatoria de León Felipe a José Luis Fernández de “Pasajes”*, undated. Freely translated: “Pasajes. Eres un gran hombre un gran artista y un ser errático que no te detendrá nadie. Yo quiero ser amigo tuyo porque los hombres como tú, que van sobre las cosas y no se paran nunca es lo que a mí me hubiera gustado ser. Te abrazo con mi corazón”.

CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, the work and life of José Luis – the painter Sarralde, or Fernández de “Pasajes”, or “Pasajes”, however he called himself – was much more complex and varied than what is shown here, surpassing the scope of this article. In almost 60 years of artistic life, he painted a large number of portraits, urban, rural and seascapes, political compositions, and scenes of everyday life. Part of his work has a realistic pictorial style, such as some portraits and landscapes; although he also developed a figurative-impressionist style in some compositions, other landscapes, and portraits, that contain great fluency of synthesis. With an innate talent for painting, José Luis “Pasajes” mastered the techniques of drawing and oil painting in an extraordinary way, having exercised his profession as a draftsman and painter uninterruptedly, from the age of 13 until his death in Mexico City on November 15, 1987, at age 70. He alternated painting with his political ideals, manifested during the Spanish Civil War and hidden during the post-war period, as it happened with any other survivor of those dark years of repression and taboo. Europe, America, especially Mexico, meant an oxygen bomb and a reopening of his political ideals, manifested in gatherings with other artists, intellectuals, and politicians, beyond the family circle. He survived, and he was able to do so by clinging to his paintbrush, which helped him coexist between red and blue.

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