

A REPLY

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May I begin first by expressing my appreciation to Joyce Bailey for her comments on my article "Art as a Source for the Study of Central America, 1945–1975: An Exploratory Essay" (LARR 13, no. 1 [1978]:39–64). A number of points are raised in her letter that deserve discussion in an interdisciplinary journal such as the *Latin American Research Review*.

First, I am not in disagreement with Bailey's discussion of the basis and training involved in the study of art. The disagreement comes in the conclusions that can be reached from such analysis and the application of those conclusions. In my research on art, and particularly Central American art, I have been disappointed by the failure of authors to deal with the subject matter of paintings. Often authors neglected subject matter entirely or treated it as secondary. Thus, I would argue there is a place for scholars to examine the subjects of paintings. Further, most studies of Central American art failed to place the artist and his work within a historical and national context.

Second, it seems to me Bailey has raised the issue of the usefulness of paintings as a source for the study of the past. Her concerns and criticism parallel many of the early evaluations of the use of oral tradition for the study of the past. But out of such evaluation and questioning has come increased refinement in the use of oral tradition. It was fascinating to me in discussing art with Central American artists to discover how readily they related their art to the study of both the past and present of their nation. Usually my questions in this area brought detailed discourses on what their paintings stated about their nation and its people and ideas. And I find it difficult to dismiss the Mexican muralists, Rivera and Orozco, as not portraying "historical facts" since "their interpretations *are* symbolic and idealized" (*italics mine*). History is not simply chronology and factual detail. It includes interpretations, emotions and symbols, which artists frequently express in their paintings.

Third, I do quite agree with Bailey that what is needed are further art historical studies. Hopefully these studies will produce new insights and greater understanding. They should evaluate effectively the subject of the paintings and those national influences which shape the interests of the artist and the impact of the artist on his nation. In an area in which much remains to be done and where often little in English is in print, the preparation of a *Handbook of Latin American Art* will serve both Latin American art and the Latin Americanist.