

## SIQUEIROS PRINTS FOR THE *CANTO GENERAL*

Mutual admiration and shared political commitments led David Alfaro Siqueiros and Pablo Neruda to establish a deep friendship. Their creative complementarity and their shared world view are captured in the first edition of *Canto General*, the ambitious work by the poet that, with epic overtones, reviews the history of Latin America. Illustrated with prints by Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, this deluxe edition, published in 1950, consisted of only 500 copies. Most of these remained in the hands of private institutions and intellectuals, which has meant that very few people have seen the illustrations of the book.

The show “Semblance and Politics: Mexican Prints”, that opens on August 12 in the School of Architecture, Art, and Design of the Universidad Diego Portales (Avenida República 180), provides the opportunity to see the works that Siqueiros produced based on the poems of Pablo Neruda that were recovered from a portfolio the artist compiled in 1969.

The pieces are characterized by an abstract expressionism, in which the painter sought to capture the force that nature has in the verses of the *Canto General*. The prints are a far cry from the naturalistic style of his renowned murals, in which he exalted his views about the Mexican revolution and Latin America.

### FRIENDS FOREVER

The relationship between Neruda and Siqueiros was marked by the help that each gave one another in critical moments, at a time when art was infused with politics.

Their first encounter was in 1940. Neruda, Chilean consul in Mexico, learned that Siqueiros had been taken prisoner after he was implicated in an attempt to assassinate Trotsky. The poet, who would later write an ode to Stalin, obtained a visa that granted Siqueiros political asylum in Chile. The problem was that he did it without authorization from the Chilean government. This indiscretion cost Neruda a two-month suspension from his position as consul.

Ten years later, his solidarity would be repaid by the painter. Neruda fled Chile clandestinely in 1948, after calling President González Videla a traitor for having declared the Communist Party illegal. In 1950 he was received as a hero in Mexico, thanks to the efforts of his friend. Neruda arrived with the manuscript of the *Canto General* under his arm. This ambitious work, which contains “Heights of Macchu Picchu”, so impressed Siqueiros that he immediately offered to illustrate its 231 poems.

On March 25 the “special and limited” edition was completed. 300 copies were reserved for intellectuals from around the world and signed by the three artists. Siqueiros had returned Neruda’s favor. The book had become a legend.

**Source:** *La Tercera*. August 10, 2010. Article by Marcelo Morales. Available on-line at [http://www.latercera.com/contenido/29\\_37898\\_9.shtml](http://www.latercera.com/contenido/29_37898_9.shtml).