

Camilo Egas, Ecuadorian Festival, 1932



CAMILO EGAS AT WORK ON *ECUADORIAN FESTIVAL*, 1932, PA1071. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY PETER A. JULEY & SON COLLECTION, SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM.

Camilo Egas taught at The New School for Social Research from 1929 until 1962. Ecuadorian by birth, Egas was a transnational figure, traveling extensively throughout western Europe. He was director of the New School Art Workshops, a series of interdisciplinary studio courses in the visual arts that helped establish the school's reputation as a center for international modernism. Egas played a pivotal role in shaping the art movement called Pictorial Indigenism.

In 1931, Alvin Johnson, director of The New School for Social Research, asked Egas to paint a mural for the new International Style building designed by Joseph Urban. The commission was part of Johnson's initiative to integrate contemporary art into the school's public spaces. Egas' mural, complementing already completed commissions by José Clemente Orozco and Thomas Hart Benton, was executed in the anteroom of the lower level dance studio, where choreographers Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey would later teach. In accordance with the theme of dance, Egas created *Ecuadorian Festival*, a work depicting a celebration that integrates dancers in native costumes from various regions of the country—a kind of cultural sampler, thereby privileging national unity over regional specificity.

Alvin Johnson discussed the Egas mural in political terms, identifying the hand in the lower left corner of the image as “the hand of Spain suppressing the Indo-American spirit.” Egas, however, described the scene as a celebration or a moment of escape, not as a form of social protest. Johnson's interpretation of *Ecuadorian Festival* reflected both the prevailing view of art as a vehicle for social justice and the institution's progressive orientation.

—Michele Greet, 2011, author of *Beyond National Identity: Pictorial Indigenism as Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920–1960*.