

### **José Bardasano - Artist**

Born in 1910, the child of Madrid working-class parents, José Bardasano seemed fated for his wartime role from his earliest years. In 1917 his father, a member of the streetcar drivers' strike committee, was jailed when the strike was brutally suppressed. With the father in Modelo prison, the police intimidated Bardasano's mother in her home, precipitating a miscarriage. Meanwhile, Bardasano, age seven, was searched and questioned when he brought a food basket to his father in jail. These were lessons the young boy would not forget. His first education was at a school run by priests, and there too the boy found no pleasure in the exercise of ignorant authority. Already he was drawn to art, making satiric sketches for the other students and skipping school to roam the street in search of itinerant painters. By age ten, Pepito, as he was called, asked permission to join the street painters himself. His father accompanied him, and one Sunday afternoon they were near the monument to Cascorro in the Rastro district in Madrid. A crowd gathered around the young painter and that was enough to attract the attention of the police, who ordered everyone to disperse. The father exhorted the crowd to support them, which they did, and the police decided to withdraw. Another lesson was learned.

Eventually the father-son team would travel throughout Andalusia, with Bardasano doing quick sketches and selling them in the streets and open markets. In 1921, convinced that he needed formal training, he enrolled in the Arts and Crafts School in Cuatro Caminos. Two years later he received a prize in ornamental drawing, though in 1926 he failed his entrance exams to the Escuela de San Fernando, the main fine arts school in Madrid. He took a job at a company producing ornamental glass doors, but was fired when he sided with striking workers. A job as artistic director of the Rex Advertising Agency followed. Meanwhile, he began to publish his drawings in *El Socialista* and entered a set of prints in the 1932 National Exhibition. Awarded second prize in the same competition two years later, he received a grant from the Count of Cartagena and embarked on a tour of France, Holland, Belgium, and England. In 1936 he received a second travel grant, but refused it when war broke out. Instead he painted "No Pasaran" banners for Madrid streets and entered a public antifascist poster contest held in the immense Plaza Mayor. The winners were chosen by popular ballot, and once again the people in the streets picked Bardasano as their favorite.

Working with three other progressive artists -- Alfonso Rodríguez Castela, Arturo Souto, and Rodríguez Luna - he set up a workshop named La Gallofa, which was affiliated with the Plastic Arts section of the JSU (United Socialist Youth Movement). Prints, drawings, and posters came from the workshop in great numbers. Dozens of them were by Bardasano himself; indeed he sent his work to publications throughout Spain. In 1937 he and his wife and brother moved to Valencia, where they continued to produce prints and posters for the JSU Plastic Arts Workshop there. In time his style of expressionist realism became perhaps the signature style of the Spanish Civil War poster. There are other styles, to be sure, from cubist to surrealist to art deco, but Bardasano's is inescapable and omnipresent in the war.

With the war's end, Bardasano struggled to get himself and his family out of Spain. They spent some time in a French concentration camp, but eventually made their way to Mexico. There he formed the Mexican Fine Arts Circle in collaboration with other Spanish exiles and native Mexicans. At first it is the war that dominated his work, and he completed a series of canvases, including "The Retreat," "Militiawoman," "Partisan," and "Terror." These paintings do not merely memorialize the past; they are blows struck against the repressive regime that then ruled Spain. In time, however, his style broadened. He did a number of formal portraits in a classical academic style to support himself. He also adopted an impressionist canvas to realize his memories of Madrid streets and neighborhoods. In 1957 the Mexican government appointed him its delegate to a Painters and Sculptor's Congress taking place in the Soviet Union. Three years later he decided to return to Spain and settled in Madrid. Eventually, with Franco's death, his country was able to recognize the work done in the crucible of the war. In 1978 his Spanish Civil War posters were again on display in Madrid; the following year, shortly before his death, his work was featured in the exhibit "One Hundred Years of Socialism."