

Juana Francisca - Artist

Juana Francisca was born in Madrid in 1914. Even as a child she enjoyed drawing, but like most Spanish women of her generation she was given little opportunity for formal training. As an artist, she was thus largely self-taught. After their marriage in 1934, however, José Bardasano encouraged her to pursue her art, which included both painting and drawing. Thereafter her work was exhibited in Madrid and Paris, but her main focus was illustrating children's books. When the civil war broke out, however, she joined the workshop called "La Gallofa" that Bardasano had organized, and she began to do drawings for wartime informational and propaganda magazines, including Boletín del Subcomisariado de Propaganda. Her 1937 drawing "Woman Hugging a Dead Soldier," executed in pencil and watercolor, was exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion in Paris in 1937. Francisca did several posters for the Madrid "Union de Muchachas," a women's group committed not only to joining the labor force in workshops and factories but also to broadening women's access to cultural and political education, changes she knew to be necessary from her own life experience. Perhaps her single most powerful poster, designed to advertise the May 1937 conference of the Union of Young Women in Madrid, shows three women in a circle holding their arms and hands aloft in the popular front salute. They wear deep brown workers' dresses, and above them their dark yellow blouses and countenances glow with light. It is a striking image of women's political and cultural strength and solidarity.

Since many Spanish Civil War poster artists only signed their work with their last names and a considerable number of posters were issued without an artist's signature, one cannot be certain how many women artists designed posters. However, Juana Francisca's name appears to be the only explicitly female one on wartime posters.