

THE WORKS PROGRAM

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-- Works Progress Administration --

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100 Selected Works of WPA Artists are Exhibited in Washington.

In the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, hang one hundred works produced by artists who have been employed under the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration throughout the country. The exhibition opened on June 15, with an invitation pre-view, attended by Works Progress Administrator Harry L. Hopkins and other leaders in government circles as well as many prominent in the art and social worlds of Washington.

The selection of works made by Duncan Phillips, Marjorie Phillips and C. Law Watkins, give a vivid cross section of the accomplishments of the Federal Art Project in easel painting, watercolor, mural design and graphic art. In addition, a room devoted to paintings and sculpture by children shows what is being done in settlements and community houses under the teaching staff of the Project. A small selection of sculpture is also included in the display.

Beauty of installation and intimate arrangement are the first impressions made by the exhibition. Downstairs, the paintings hang as in a private home in three living rooms with antique furniture and mellow toned rugs. There are no long rows of pictures, no crowding, no rigid classification. Spectacular subject matter and easy recipes for interpreting the American scene are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, the visitor feels almost at once an emphasis upon sound technical accomplishment, a freshness of personal vision and a freedom from imitative influences.

On the second floor, one large and a series of smaller rooms, give both informality and the advantage of pleasant and congenial groupings for various types of work. In the main gallery, long wall spaces provide an excellent background for the mural sketches for several schools in Illinois which are one of the features of the exhibition.

Accompanying these designs are a group of watercolors by artists from various sections of the country, ranging from some striking figure subjects to poetic interpretations of Middle Western farming country. Turning into the smaller rooms, the visitor finds selections revealing the variety of mood and vitality of expression that appear in the water colors being done in many sections of the country from New York to California. Selected examples of the graphic arts invite the print lover to linger in another special gallery, while the surprising compositions of child artists give strong color accents to another room.

A number of the most striking paintings in the exhibition hang in the downstairs hall, along the stairway and on landings where the visitor naturally pauses before turning into the smaller rooms. One of these is Joseph Stella's "The Bridge" with its vibrant blues and taut, electrical upward rhythms. Another is John Walley's sketch for a theatre curtain in the Auditorium of the Lane Technical High School in Chicago. Here, onrushing Indians, a buffalo herd, deer and Indian dancers combine in a design filled with action and imagination. A third striking work is Stuart Davis' "Waterfront" interpreted in semi-abstract forms that contrast strongly in their brilliant patterning with the idyllic mood of William Schwartz' "Village Square" hanging close by. Another of the largest works, a sand painting by Red Robin, Zuni Indian artist from Colorado, uses traditional tribal motives in a technique that has unique interest.

Several of the water color designs for murals have a strong subject appeal as well as high aesthetic merit. By Emanuel Jacobson are "Transportation," "Early Schoolhouse" and "Early American Parlor" which are being executed for the Horace Mann School in Oak Park, Illinois. With their restful spacing and draughtsmanship and pure, flat color these murals express the spirit and life of a not far distant past in a decorative style that is essentially American.

Strongly in contrast, but equally true in their feeling for mural values, are Karl Kelp's "Farmers" and "Early Settlers", two of the designs for a fresco in the Hawthorne School in Chicago. Strong, massed movement and rich harmonies are the outstanding characteristics of these designs. Strength of style and originality of conception appear in Mitchell Siporin's "Prairie Poets" a sketch in egg tempera for a proposed mural in one of the Chicago schools, while Rolf



Henrichsen's "Earth, Air and Fire" which is one of a series of panels for the Auditorium of the Gordon School in Lake Forest, Illinois, has a delicacy that is in accord with the subject matter.

Bernice Cross of Washington, D. C. also contributes a design for a mural for Friendship House which has a highly personal phantasy. Another large painting by this artist is also included in the exhibition.

Among the oil paintings, which are shown for the most part in the downstairs rooms, there is great variety of style and subject matter. Many of these works are by artists from the New York district. Austin Mecklem's "Landscape" unfolds a glowing panorama, enlivened by figures of skaters sheltered by winter hills. Saul Berman, in another large canvas gives a sensitive and personal vision of spring in Washington Square. Louis Guglielmi in "Hague Street" casts a mood of reserved beauty over a sordid district. A compact and aristocratic still life is achieved by Stuart Edie who combines a T-square, a globe and other motives.

Yvonne Twining of Massachusetts is a realist with an eye for the vivid, humorous details of city life. Her "Washington Street" is a lively place. Allan Crite, a Negro artist from this same state, also contributes a street scene that has intensity of feeling and style.

Other easel paintings which show individuality in depicting various aspects of the American scene include "Stone Quarry" by Joseph de Martini, "Vermont Village" by Prestopino, "Coal Barge" by Bumpei Usui and "Oyster Boats" by Georgina Klitgaard. A solid note of Western realism appears in the "Golden, Colorado," of Eugene Trentham of Denver.

Among the figure subjects in the exhibition, done both in oil and water color are a number of strongly conceived works. Sam Brown, the young Negro artist from Philadelphia uses a blue that is infused with tenderness in his "Child Prodigy" and "Girl Reading." Jack Levine of Boston in "At the Table" strikes a note that is representative of the vitality that is now appearing in the work of many New England artists. Elizabeth Terrell of New York City with "Girl and Marionette" and William Earl Singer of Illinois in "Young Student" show other trends towards figure compositions that are personal in character and execution.

The water colors form the largest group in the exhibition and here, especially there is evidence that a definite decentralization of talent is taking place under the Federal Art Project. This impulse appears in different centers throughout the

country such as Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, California, Massachusetts, Ohio and Iowa.

Among the large group of young watercolorists from Illinois, there appears a fairly marked trend away from industrial subjects to poetic interpretations of Middle Western farming country. Rainey Bennett with his tender and evocative interpretations of apple orchards and pasture lands and Raymond Breinin who brings a haunting note of blue to his "Lonesome Farm" are representative of this fresh and vital development. However, Aaron Bohrod, who discovers beauty in the drabness of Halstead Street shows that artists are still aware of the stimulation of our great cities.

Many other sections of the country have also reached a new distinction in the water color medium under the direction of the Federal Art Project. "Houses on the River" by Karl Zerbe of Massachusetts shows tonal mastery in the use of the varied green sharpened with vermilion and white, while Helen Dickson from this same state communicates the isolation of her locale in the tones and composition of "Fisherman's Shack."

J. de Mers, Carlos Dyer and A. Rexroth from California contribute work that is marked by a true regionalism. Their work communicates the differences in light and sky and water that distinguish the Pacific coast from the Eastern seaboard.

In Minnesota, Cameron Booth uses water color with unusual depth and solidity in "Street Scene" while Fenelle in "Homing Pigeons in Storm" uses this same medium to attain subtle atmospheric effects.

Two Ohio artists, William Sommers and Jack Greitzer contribute works that communicate a compelling mood. From Iowa come Arnold Pyle's derelict locomotive and Glenn Chamberlain's "Landscape", while a crisp, decisive quality of line and color marks the "Fishing Boat" of Lewandowski, a Wisconsin artist.

Claire Sibber, a Louisiana artist, chronicles a picturesque scene in her state in "Napoleon Dock."

The few pieces of sculpture which are included in the exhibition reveal such contrasting trends as the subtly graceful figures of Concetta Scaravaglione and the humor and sharpness of "The Cyclist" by Rayford.