

## THE FEDERAL ART PROGRAMS, 1933-43

Public Works of Art Project (1933-34, PWAP)  
 Treasury Section of Fine Arts (1934-43)  
 Treasury Relief Art Project (1935-38, TRAP)  
 Works Progress Administration – Federal Art Project (1935-43, WPA-FAP)

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)  
 Civil Works Administration (CWA)

PWAP lasted four and a half months and cost \$1,312,117. It employed 3,749 artists and produced 15,663 art and craft objects, including 706 murals and mural sketches, 3,821 oils, 2,938 water-colors, 1,518 prints, and 647 sculptures.

Treasury Section of Fine Arts: 190 competitions, received 40,000+ sketches, awarded 1,371 commissions. The Section decorated 1,118 buildings in 1,083 cities. Commissions for Post Offices were at fees ranging from \$200 or \$300 to \$26,000.

WPA-FAP: created: 2,566 murals, 17,744 sculptures, 108,099 works in oil and other media, and some 240,000 impressions of 11,285 prints. It has been estimated that it cost around \$35,000,000.<sup>1</sup> In late 1936 when the FAP was at its height it employed around 5,300 artists.

### PWAP:

Jacob Getlar Smith, *Snow Shovellers*; Harry Gottlieb, *Filling the Ice House*; Saul Berman, *River Front*; Joe Jones, *Street Scene*; O. Louis Guglielmi, *Martyr Hill*. (all Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC)

Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: Slavery through Reconstruction* (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X Boulevard, New York)

Maurice Glickman, *Negro Mother and Child* (Department of the Interior, Washington, DC)

Coit Tower, San Francisco: Ralph Stackpole, *Industries of California*; Victor Arnautoff, *City Life*; Bernard Zakheim, *Library*; John Langley Howard, *California Industrial Scenes*; Clifford Wight, *Steel Worker*

### Treasury Section of Fine Arts:

William Gropper, *Building of a Dam*, Department of Interior Building (1938-9)

Lucille Blanche, USPO, Appalachia, VA (1940)

Harry Sternberg, *Chicago: Epoch of a Great City*, Lakeview USPO, Chicago (1938)

Decatur, Illinois, USPO (1938):

Edgar Britton, North Lobby: North Wall: *Discovery, Use, and Conservation of Natural Resources: "the pioneer settler" – "the family", "agriculture and water power", "invention of the steel plough" "building of the railroads" – "mining and manufacturing" – "architectural and engineering developments"*

Mitchell Siporin, Central Lobby, west wall above counters: *The Fusion of Agriculture and Industry in Illinois*: Panel A: *"pioneer family"*; Panel B: *"workers of today"*; Panel C: *"the actual exchange of the products of agriculture with the products of industry"*

<sup>1</sup> Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (1975), 126.

**WPA-FAP**

Newark Airport Murals: Photo: Arshile Gorky working on *Activities on the Field* (1936); *Mechanics of Flying* and *Aerial Map* (1936-7) (Newark Museum)  
 Willammsburg Housing, Brooklyn: Balcomb Greene, *Untitled* (c. 1937-9); Albert Swinden, *Abstract Painting* (1937-9) (Brooklyn Museum); Stuart Davis, *Swing Landscape* (1938) (University of Indiana Art Museum, Bloomington)

Easel Paintings: Mitchell Siporin, *Back of the Yards* (1938); Edward Millman, *Flophouse* (1937); O. Louis Guglielmi, *Relief Blues* (c. 1937).

Prints: Joan Gross-Bettelheim, *Industrial Section* (1936); Blanche Grambs, *Miners*; Ernest Crichlow, *Lovers* (1938)

**ARTISTS' UNION:**

Begins summer 1933 as Unemployed Artists' Group within New York John Reed Club. Given focus in first instance by Emergency Work and Relief Bureau of the Gibson Committee, which in 1932-3 employed around 1,000 artists. UAG called for New York State to pay artists a living wage or buy their completed works. Subsequently called for a program of mural and sculptural decorations for public buildings; a federal purchasing program linked with traveling exhibitions; and a program for teaching arts and crafts. UAG acts as an artists' pressure group during operation of PWAP. On nine occasions picketed the Whitney Museum, whose director Juliana Force was also director of PWAP in New York.

February 1934 UAG becomes the Artists' Union, with headquarters on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street. By autumn 1934 its membership passed 700. More than doubled by time WPA-FAP started in 1935. Approaches AFL to become an affiliate but turned down.

1938 renames itself United American Artists and becomes an affiliate of United Office and Professional Workers of America-CIO. Of central importance in representing artists' interests with WPA-FAP administration. E.g. mass picket of CAA offices by artists in 1935 which led to 83 arrests. Plays a role comparable to that of the Communist instigated Workers' Alliance in WPA as a whole. But also organizes exhibitions, lectures, and social events.

With winding down of Federal Art Project after 1939 the UAG loses its *raison d'être*. May 1942 disaffiliates from UOPWA and fuses with the American Artists' Congress to form the Artists' League of America (1942-9).

Sources on the Artists' Union: Gerald Monroe: 'The Artists' Union of New York', D.Ed thesis, New York University, 1971; 'Artists as Militant Trade Union Workers During the Great Depression', *Archives of American Art Journal* 17, no.1 (1974); 'Artists on the Barricades: The Militant Artists' Union Treats with the New Deal', *Archives of American Art Journal* 18, no.3 (1978); Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (Yale University Press, 2002).