

press
release

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for immediate release

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digital images available upon request
(see last page of release)



Weisman Art Museum exhibition *By the People, for the People* celebrates 75th anniversary of “New Deal” programs

Exhibition dates: May 9–July 27, 2008

Preview party: Thursday, May 8, 7:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.

Seventy-five years ago, in the midst of the Great Depression, America was gripped by staggering unemployment, farm drought, and a floundering manufacturing industry. In response, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched the New Deal—a massive federal relief and reform effort—in 1933. Of the millions of Americans employed by New Deal programs, thousands were artists. Their work, created during what was the first major era of government art funding in America, is the subject of the Weisman’s new exhibition, *By the People, for the People: New Deal Art at the Weisman*.

The Weisman is an official federal repository of some 1,000 works created by nearly 200 New Deal artists. The museum’s collection includes works that survey the accomplishments of New Deal artists from Minnesota and across the country—artists like Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Berenice Abbott, Edward Weston, and others who went on to accomplished artistic careers after the New Deal programs ended in the early 1940s. *By the People, for the People* showcases selections from the Weisman’s vast holdings in this area with work by more than 60 artists in a range of media, including photography, paintings, prints, drawings, ceramics and textiles.

Curator Diane Mullin says one of the exhibition’s goals is “to show audiences the plethora of artists involved in this project—men, women, photographers, painters, expressionists, social realists. A real diversity was supported, and that’s surprising sometimes. We associate the New Deal with iconic images of 1930s America—the social realist work—but really, there was a lot of diversity.” The exhibition reflects that stylistic diversity and includes social realism, expressionism, lyrical abstraction, and regional versions of surrealism.

The New Deal works in the Weisman’s collection were acquired in the late 1930s and early 1940s through a special arrangement with the federal government that allowed tax-supported institutions (like the University of Minnesota) to acquire these works for only the cost of the goods used to produce them—that is, the cost of canvas, paper, paint, clay, and other materials. Ruth Lawrence, then the director of the University of Minnesota Art Gallery, took advantage of this arrangement to acquire the New Deal works that are now on extended loan from the federal government to the Weisman.

The exhibition is divided into four conceptual categories: The New Deal and the University of Minnesota (including works created for campus buildings and by artists working on campus); The Other Half: Women and the WPA; Minnesota as Subject; and Outside the Box: American Modernism and the New Deal.



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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PREVIEW PARTY BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: NEW DEAL ART AT THE WEISMAN

Thursday, May 8, 2008, 7:00–10:00 p.m.

Celebrate the opening of *By the People, for the People* in a classic 1930s jazz club atmosphere. Enjoy food, drinks sponsored by Finnegans, and sultry 1930s jazz by musicians Lee Engele (vocals), Rick Carlson (piano), and Steve Pikal (bass).

Preview party admission:

Weisman members, students, and seniors: \$5 per person

General public: \$10 per person

RSVP at 612-625-4460 by May 5, 2008 or email

About the Weisman:

The Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota presents its rich collection, diverse programs, and remarkable building to stimulate minds and imaginations and to link the University and the community in creative collaboration and discovery.

Location, directions, and parking:

The Weisman is located at 333 E. River Road in Minneapolis. There is no admission fee to the Weisman, and it is open to the public Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday: 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Thursday: 10:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m.; and Saturday and Sunday: 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. The Museum is closed on Mondays. Public Parking is available in the museum ramp and in the East River Parkway ramp for the posted rates. For more information, visit www.weisman.umn.edu or call 612-625-9494.

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RELATED PROGRAMS

BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: NEW DEAL ART AT THE WEISMAN

Programs are free unless otherwise noted.

Thursday, May 8, 5:00 p.m. – Lecture and book signing

PICTURING NEW DEAL AMERICA: THE VISUAL ARTS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY, 1933–1945

Erika Doss

Surveying the variety of visual arts produced in the United States under various New Deal federal art programs from 1933 to 1945, this talk will examine the shifting dynamics of citizenship, public participation, and national identity during the Great Depression. Erika Doss is chair of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame and a leading historian of American art and visual culture.

She is the author of *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* and *Twentieth-Century American Art*. Attend this lecture and **receive free admission to the preview party** for *By the People, for the People: New Deal Art at the Weisman* (see details above).

Thursday, June 12, 7:00 p.m. – Lecture

THE WALKER ART CENTER AND THE MINNESOTA WPA

Rosemary Furtak and Jill Vuchetich

In addition to building public projects like roads, bridges and dams, the WPA also built art museums. Walker Art Center is one of 73 museums in the country with roots in the WPA. In a time of poverty and despair, a group of hopeful, civic-minded art lovers transformed one man's private art collection into a public center for the arts—which became one of the premiere contemporary art museums in the country. Walker Art Center staff members Rosemary Furtak, librarian, and Jill Vuchetich, archivist, will discuss the Walker's participation in the WPA and how it transformed the museum.

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RELATED PROGRAMS, continued

Tuesday, June 24, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. – Curiosity Camp

FROM HOMESPUN TO HANDMADE: FOLK ART, SEED PICTURES, AND THE CALL TO CREATE

Linda Koutsky, Jean McElvain, and Colleen Sheehy

Registration fee: \$125

Continuing Education and Conference Center, St. Paul Campus, U of M

To register, call 612-624-4000. For more information, visit www.cce.umn.edu/curiosity

Despite our technologically advanced age, the handmade object continues to have great value and appeal. Participants will learn about the larger context of folk art and its varied expressions, and then focus on a discussion of the Minnesota tradition of seed mosaics or crop art, a featured competitive category at the Minnesota State Fair’s Horticulture-Agriculture Division. Special attention will be devoted to the life and work of crop artist extraordinaire Lillian Colton, whose seed portraits of Abraham Lincoln, Elvis, Judy Garland, Prince, and other famous people have been a tradition at the Minnesota State Fair for decades.

Thursday, June 26, 7:00 p.m. – Lecture followed by reception

OBJECTS, LANDSCAPES, PEOPLE: THE DOCUMENTARY IMPULSE IN NEW DEAL ART

Paula Rabinowitz

Paula Rabinowitz will explore the cultural impulse toward realism, facts, and documentary in 1930s American culture. She will link the works in *By the People, for the People* to other popular manifestations such as *True Crime* magazines, social realist novels, the living theater movement, Hollywood gangster films, and Woody Guthrie’s lyrics. The lecture will examine the technological, ideological, social, and economic forces that impelled artists and audiences to discover facts, and consider the impact of the WPA within this context.

Paula Rabinowitz, chair of the University of Minnesota department of English, has written about American culture of the 1930s and the documentary tradition as well as the development of modernism in American literature and art.

Monday, July 14, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. – Curiosity Camp

THE ARTISTIC LEGACY OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Hy Berman and Diane Mullin

Weisman Art Museum

Registration fee: \$125

To register, call 612-624-4000. For more information: www.cce.umn.edu/curiosity

Explore the history and legacy of New Deal federal arts programs, including the Works Progress Administration, Farm Security Administration, and the Public Works of Art Project. During this day-long immersion program, hear from historian Hy Berman about the political and economic factors that gave rise to these programs during one of America’s most economically strained eras. Discover how these programs were received, and why, for example, some referred to the WPA as “We Poke Along” or “We Putter Around.” Then explore the Weisman’s collection of New Deal art by taking an exclusive tour of *By the People, for the People: New Deal Art at the Weisman* with Weisman curator Diane Mullin.

Thursday, July 24, 7:00 p.m. – Civic Dialogue (refreshments served)

RE-INSPIRING CITIZENSHIP IN THE 2008 ELECTION

Featuring participants in the November 5th Coalition and The Citizen Solution, including Harry Boyte and Don Shelby

The November 5th Coalition is a broad national alliance to renew cross-partisan civic action in this election season. Harry Boyte, founder and co-director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Citizenship and Democracy and one of the leaders of the November 5th Coalition, and other members of the national group will discuss the renewal of Minnesota’s citizenship action tradition across partisan divisions to solve civic problems. WCCO newscaster Don Shelby will also participate. Boyte will draw from his new book *The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make A Difference*, in which he discusses how to move past slash-and-burn politics in this election season.

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BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: NEW DEAL ART AT THE WEISMAN

May 9–July 27, 2008

Digital images available upon request. Email Christopher James at james052@umn.edu or call 612-625-9685.



IMAGE CREDITS

top left: Dorothea Lau, *Workers–Five O'Clock*, ca. 1935-1940, oil on canvas

top right: Edward Weston, *Squash–#248C*, 1936, gelatin silver print

bottom left: Berenice Abbott, *Murray Hill Hotel: Spiral, 112 Park Avenue, Manhattan*, 1935, gelatin silver print

bottom right: Alexander Corazzo, *Abstraction No. 10*, ca. 1936, oil on canvas