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Feb. 20, 2009

Fact Sheet “1934: A New Deal for Artists”

Exhibition

“1934: A New Deal for Artists”
Feb. 27 – Jan. 3, 2010

Location

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Eighth and F streets N.W.

Description

In 1934, Americans grappled with an economic situation that feels all too familiar today. Against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the U.S. government created the Public Works of Art Project—the first federal government program to support the arts nationally. Federal officials in the 1930s understood how essential art was to sustaining America’s spirit. Artists from across the United States who participated in the program, which lasted only six months from mid-December 1933 to June 1934, were encouraged to depict “the American Scene.” The Public Works of Art Project not only paid artists to embellish public buildings, but also provided them with a sense of pride in serving their country. They painted regional, recognizable subjects—ranging from portraits to cityscapes and images of city life to landscapes and depictions of rural life—that reminded the public of quintessential American values such as hard work, community and optimism.

“1934: A New Deal for Artists” celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Public Works of Art Project by drawing on the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s unparalleled collection of vibrant paintings created for the program. The 56 paintings in the exhibition are a lasting visual record of America at a specific moment in time. George Gurney, deputy chief curator, organized the exhibition with Ann Prentice Wagner, curatorial associate. The exhibition will begin a three-year national tour in 2010. Details about an array of free public programs and online initiatives are available at americanart.si.edu.

Publication

A catalog, fully illustrated in color and co-published by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and D Giles Ltd. in London, is forthcoming in July 2009. It will feature an essay by Roger Kennedy, historian and director emeritus of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History; individual entries for each artwork by Wagner; and an introduction by the museum’s director Elizabeth Broun. The book will be available online and in the museum store for \$49.95 (softcover \$34).

Credit

“1934: A New Deal for Artists” is organized and circulated by the Smithsonian American Art Museum with support from the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment Fund and the Smithsonian Council for American Art. The C.F. Foundation in Atlanta supports the museum’s traveling exhibition program, “Treasures to Go.”

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. It is open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information: (202) 633-7970. Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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