

The Art Museum at the University of Kentucky
“Breaking Tradition, Forging Ahead: WPA Prints from the Collection.”



Football A woodcut by Louis Schanker

LEXINGTON, Ky. (July 17, 2008) – While the Great Depression caused an economic slump that affected markets across the world, the United States saw artistic accomplishments boom as creativity was allowed to flourish under the federal government’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). The program, which provided jobs to several artists across the nation, would go on to define a uniquely American approach to art. In celebration of the 75th anniversary of this program and at the request of a museum studies class, the Art Museum at the University of Kentucky is presenting “Breaking Tradition, Forging Ahead: WPA Prints from the Collection.”

During the Great Depression, artists supported by the WPA were offered a living wage in exchange for their art, which led to the exploration of new media and content and an artistic boom in the U.S. "Breaking Tradition," organized by students in a museum studies class under the direction of Christine Huskisson and museum staff, showcases a variety of works on paper selected from a WPA collection presented to UK in 1943.

"Breaking Tradition" aims to bring to light the art of an era that set artistic expression free. The show displays prints by such renowned artists as Louis Schanker, Max Kahn, Anne Rice O'Hanlon and Miné Okubo, now known to many for their work in woodcuts, printmaking, lithographs, paintings and murals. The exhibition of WPA art from artists such as these aims to have patrons asking themselves “What if you were free to express yourself?”

Many individuals familiar with the work funded by the WPA also recall the history of the program's popular public murals. Among the museum exhibition are prints from O'Hanlon, one of the numerous artists assigned to create these murals. Local audiences may recognize the name of this artist, as O'Hanlon created one such mural at UK's Memorial Hall. The WPA mural, one of the few remaining historic murals of its kind still in existence today, can still be viewed there.

"Breaking Tradition" is a free exhibition that is open to the public. Patrons can see the show through Sept. 15. Museum hours are noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday and noon to 8 p.m. Friday. For more information, visit the museum's Web site or call (859) 257-5716.