

WNYC Radio Studio, Municipal Building

WPA Murals Of WNYC

You bring the controversy over abstract art (this is no special one—there's always a controversy over abstract art) right out of the studios of the painters and the galleries of the dealers and into the consciousness of the general public when you show examples of it in a radio station. There a truly representative crowd, a cross-section, in fact, of the whole city's population, comes head-up against them. And there, you'd think, if you really want to hear heated discussion, is where you'll find it.

And yet the reception of the four abstract WPA Federal Art Project murals installed in the studios and lobby of municipal radio station WNYC a few weeks ago hasn't started any major conflagrations. Not that the scrubwomen, civil service employees, musicians and city executives who daily pass them by have ignored them. You can't very well, especially if whatever art you've ever noticed before has been conventional, academic and sentimentally illustrative, miss noticing these large arrangements of squares, spirals and assorted plane geometry placed on formerly bare walls and called "art."

Public Likes Them.

The amazing thing is that the public has liked them. They've asked for explanations—and they have a perfect right to.

But when informed that these abstract murals were painted because in decorations suited to use in a modern broadcasting studio everything must contribute to the quiet and the uninterrupted function of the broadcast; that in them one can find the best complement to the balance, harmony and rhythm of the music or poetry or drama being broadcast; and, that, being free of tradition and convention, they are better able to express the spirit of a form of communication itself completely a product of our time and entirely apart from anything known in the past, the public has readily understood.

Whether they'll take the next step and grant validity to abstract painting anywhere they find it is, of course, impossible to guess.

Schanker's Decoration.

Of the four panels on view, Louis Schanker's decoration for the lobby is the largest, and perhaps the most successful, too. Against a panel of color nuances, predominantly blue and green, calligraphic symbols suggesting musical instruments and, in one corner, a radio transmitter, have been drawn in bold black outlines. The whole arrangement really does have the pace, the movement, the tonal quality and the swinging rhythm of the music it symbolizes.

Presented Last Thursday To Neponsit Institution

Two murals, "Children at Work and Play," and "Circus," were formally presented on Thursday to the Neponsit Beach Hospital by the WPA Federal Art Project.

The murals are the work, respectively, of Helen West Heller and Louis Schanker. They were presented at a brief ceremony by Burgoyne Diller, head of the WPA mural division, to Mrs. Catherine Farley, assistant to the superintendent of the hospital.

Samuel H. Friedman, director of information of the art project; Mr. Diller, the two artists, and Miss Jessica Vient, superintendent of the hospital, spoke briefly. Mr. Diller expressed "a sincere hope that the murals prove inspirational to confined children, showing, as they do, what can be done by crippled children to join in the activities of others."

Miss Vient thanked Mr. Diller and said she was sure that future children patients of the hospital would be inspired by the murals. The Heller mural, done on pressed wood with egg tempera, and covering 213 square feet, in thirty-three panels, is located in the boys' ward, second floor.

It shows crippled boys whittling model airplanes, watching an orangrinder's monkey, planting seeds and taking part in other activities. The normal children in the groups are shown in a great variety of activities, including apple-picking, chicken-feeding, berry-picking, sitting around a campfire, running races, building a snowman and working in wood and stone.

Mr. Schanker's "Circus" shows almost all the aspects of a performance under "the Big Top" and covers the four walls of the ground-floor children's dining room. It has an area of 325 square feet and is done in wax tempera.

MURALS APPROVED OF 5 WPA ARTISTS

Sketches for Three Schools
and a Hospital Passed by
the City Art Commission.

HUNTER COLLEGE BENEFITS

Abraham Lincoln and Textile
High Schools and Neponsit
Beach Hospital Also Aided.

The sketches for murals of five artists working in the WPA Art Work for Public Buildings Project have received the preliminary approval of the Art Commission of New York City.

The murals are to decorate Hunter College's Bronx buildings, Neponsit Beach Hospital, Rockaway Park; Abraham Lincoln High School, Brooklyn, and Textile High School, Manhattan.

Louis Ferstadt has designed the painting for Hunter College, which will consist of two panels in each of two foyers, one for Davis Hall and one for Gellet Hall. The pictures will be executed in oil on canvas and will occupy 276 square feet of space. The subject is "Woman's Influence on Civilization."

For the Neponsit Beach Hospital, one mural will be done by Helen West Heller and the other by Louis Schanker. Miss Heller's design is for the boys' ward and depicts "Boys and Girls at Work and Play," illustrating activities in which crippled children can participate. Mr. Schanker's mural is for the main dining room and depicts the more colorful and exciting phases of circus life.

Seymour Fogel will execute in oil, on canvas, a mural for Music Room 137 at the Abraham Lincoln High School, to be called "Music, Primitive, Classic and Modern."

Textile High School's mural, to be painted by Michael Loew, will occupy the west foyer. Its 800 square feet of space will be devoted to representations of the different phases in the history of textile production.

615 000 BB175 FOR A BOOK

At the Hacker Gallery, the color prints produced in Studio 74 (run by Louis Schanker) are on view. The master outdoes even the best of his pupils and associates, for there is a subtlety in his use of these media and an imagery in his prints often lacking elsewhere. Of the others, Merrill Ames, Peter Scolamero, Robert Howard and Robert Cohen seemed outstanding

A. B. L.

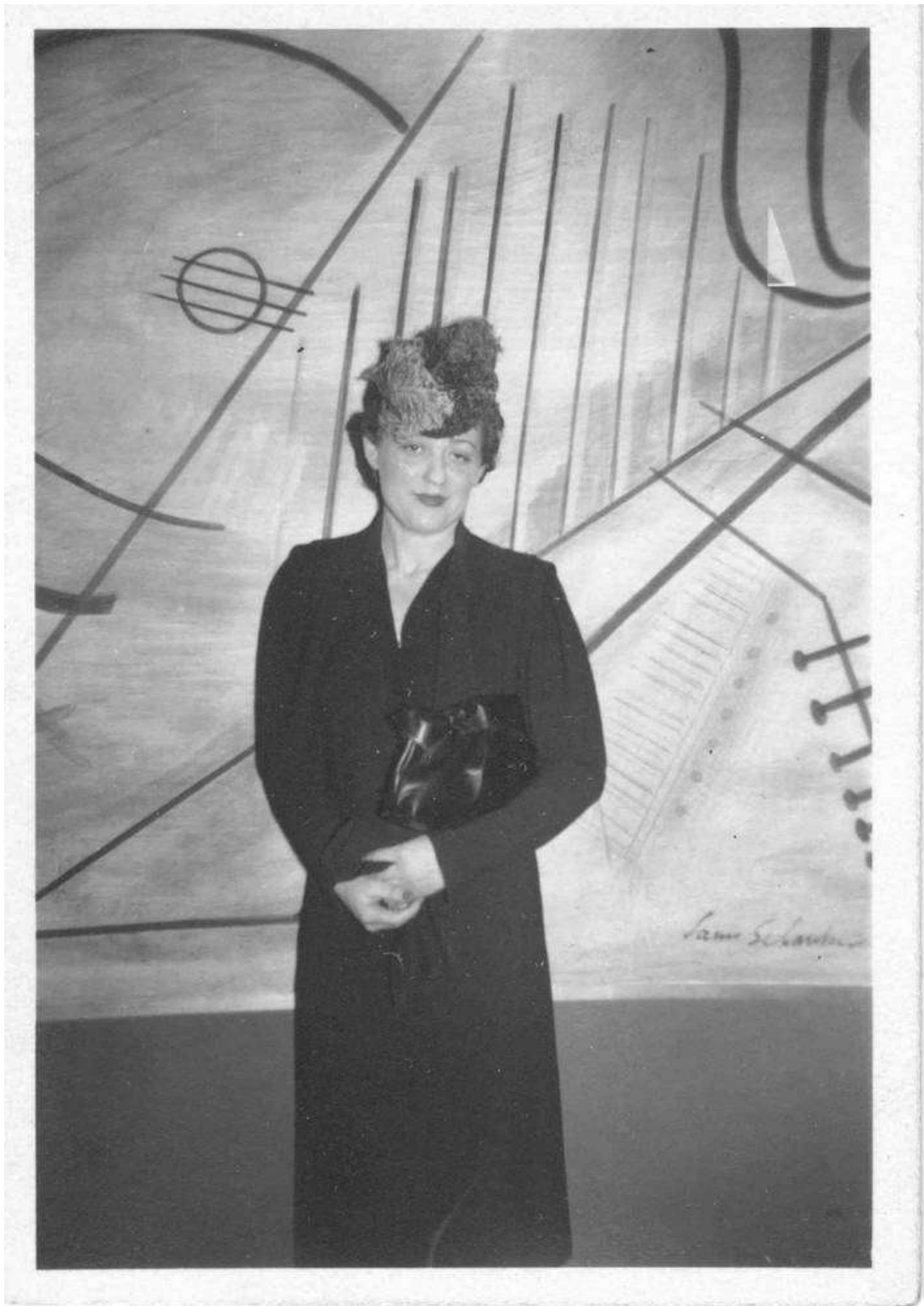
This mural by Louis Schanker is placed in the reception room of Municipal Radio Station WNYC. Painted under the direction of the New York City WPA Art Project, the mural is based on the forms and shapes of musical instruments and symbolizes rhythm.

Music

Elle Siegmeister

TWO events occurred last month which bear witness to the growing receptivity of audiences towards American music: Koussevitzky's Boston Symphony concerts and the first TAC Music Cabaret. Though the programs spoke quite different musical languages and were addressed to two different kinds of audience, they were both all-American from start to finish. This fact would be commonplace if mentioned in con-





**Concert pianist Nadia Reisenberg standing in front of the
Louis Schanker WPA mural at WNYC, April 25, 1942
25th floor of the Municipal Building, N.Y.C.**

History Notes: Volume 1, Issue 9

December 31, 2010 –

Concert pianist Nadia Reisenberg standing in front of the Louis Schanker WPA mural at WNYC, April 25, 1942.*

In 1921, Reisenberg played her first orchestral concert: the *Rimsky-Korsakov Concerto* with the Warsaw Philharmonic under Artur Rodzinski, who was also making his conducting debut. Reisenberg was the sister of theremin player Clara Rockmore and the mother of WQXR's Robert Sherman, whom we thank for this wonderful snapshot. For more information on the reknown sisters check out [The Nadia Reisenberg and Clara Rockmore Foundation](#).

*While we've been unable to document if Reisenberg actually performed on WNYC that April 25th we can't fathom any other reason for her being at the station. We do know, however, that later that year, December 13, 1942, she was on WQXR as part of a War Bond Concert. She performed that day with the Perole String Quartet and cellist Joseph Schuster. Abram Chasins was the musical commentator and Henry J. Taylor the guest speaker. Works by Rachmaninoff and Gliere were played.

- [Archives and Preservation](#)

Established in the year 2000, the WNYC Archives are the station's physical link to its rich and storied past. [More](#)



The WNYC WPA Murals



The Art

The figures and scenes, all drawn from life by artist Laszlo Matulay, capture the essence of New York's public radio station in 1939. Fiorello H. La Guardia ran for mayor in 1933 promising to close the station down to save taxpayer money. Seymour N. Siegel and others convinced La Guardia to keep it going, and he became its champion and a regular on-air presence. He is pictured top and center wearing his large trademark cowboy hat, a throwback to his youth as an Army brat on a military base in Arizona, where his father was stationed as a bandmaster.

Just below Mayor La Guardia is WNYC's then main reception desk at the north end of the 25th floor, where the elevator banks are. The receptionist is sitting in front of one of four [WPA-commissioned murals](#) dedicated on [August 2, 1939](#). This one, by [Louis Schanker](#), still hangs there.

For the full story and more on Laszlo Matulay go to:

<http://www.wnyc.org/story/wnyc-scene-sampler-circa-1939/>

THE N.Y. TIMES - SUNDAY, MAY 29, 1938



Left — "Circus," panel of WPA mural by Louis Schanker, for Children's Dining Room, at Neponsit Beach Hospital. At Federal Art Gallery.





**Schanker in front of mural placed at
Health and Science Building 1939 World's Fair**



Louis Schanker's mural at the World's Fair Hall of Medicine and Public Health, 1939

APRIL 17-MAY 13 1939

GRAPHICS

IN

COLOR

BY

5

ARTISTS

OF THE
FEDERAL ART PROJECT

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

RAYMOND AND RAYMOND GALLERIES
40 EAST 49TH STREET. N.Y.C.

EXHIBITION

GRAPHICS IN COLOR

FIVE FEDERAL BY ART PROJECT ARTISTS

APRIL 17
to MAY
13, 1939

RAYMOND AND RAYMOND GALLERY
40 East 52nd Street New York City

Sponsored by Raymond and Raymond and
THE FEDERAL ART PROJECT

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 1939.

Five artists of the Federal Art Project, WPA, are represented by color prints at the galleries of Raymond & Raymond. Louis Schanker's color in semi-abstracts and Russell Limbach's frank statements are perhaps most interesting. Augustus Peck, Bernard Schardt and Hyman Warsager are the others of the group.

FOREWORD

This is the first exhibition sponsored by the WPA Federal Art Project which puts on view both work produced for the Project and non-Project work produced by its artists on their own time. "Graphics in Color" initiates a new policy in relation to such exhibitions, made possible at this time through the joint sponsorship of the Raymond and Raymond Gallery and the Federal Art Project.

All five of the artists represented in this show have concentrated on color printing, a field which the Graphic Art Division of the Project has been actively developing. Four of the exhibitors, Russell Limbach, Augustus Peck, Bernard Schardt and Hyman Warsager, have carried on their technical and color experiments in connection with their work for the Graphic Art Division, while Louis Schanker, artist in the Project's Mural Division, has worked independently.

The Federal Art Project takes this opportunity to extend its thanks to the Raymond and Raymond Gallery for its cooperation in co-sponsoring this exhibition and to the participating artists for their collaborative efforts.

TO THE PUBLIC

Although the primary objective of the Federal Art Project of the U. S. Works Progress Administration is the employment of artists from the relief rolls, the project has been able to create works of art for the public which have a definite social value to the community. Public schools, hospitals, libraries, armories, post-offices, courthouses and other tax-supported public institutions are eligible for allocations of oil and water color paintings, portraits, sculpture, stained glass, posters, dioramas, photographs, and mural decorations. In addition, schools, libraries, settlements, clubs, neighborhood centers - and, indeed, wherever the community congregates - offer free classes under the supervision and guidance of the art teaching division of the WPA Federal Art Project.

The WPA Federal Art Project in New York City consists of the following divisions:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Art Teaching | Murals |
| Easel Paintings | Photography |
| Exhibitions | Posters |
| Four Arts Design Unit | Sculpture |
| Graphic Art | Stained Glass |
| Index of American Design | Restoration, Installation |
| Information and Records | and Technical Service |
| Models Service | Visual Education |
| Model Making and Scenic Design | |

Inquiries about exhibitions and requests for information about the Federal Art Project outside of the New York and New Jersey area should be directed to Mr. Holger Cahill, National Director, Federal Art Project, Works Progress Administration, 1734 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C.

LOUIS SCHANKER

18. Abstraction
19. Non-objective
20. Men on Horseback
21. Acrobats
22. Composition
23. Cafe
24. Family
25. Girl with Lute
26. Duet
27. Conversation
28. Man at Piano
29. Polo Players
30. Musical Clowns
31. Trio
32. Composition
33. Dictator's Dream

Color Woodcuts

BERNARD SCHARDT

34. Woman Cutting Bread
35. Girl with Comb
- *36. Farming
- *37. Girl Sewing
- *38. Ozark Kitchen
- *39. Woman in Kitchen
- *40. Still Life
41. The Sleeping Hunter

Color Woodcuts

* Lent by the WPA Federal Art Project

american arts

art . music . dance . theatre . literature . radio . film



monthly

JUNE 1937 • 25 cts.



W i t h this issue a new, larger and finer AMERICAN ARTS MONTHLY makes its bow. Its program will continue to be the furtherance of all the American arts, bringing to the American people the most advanced efforts of present-day painters, poets, musicians and all other creative and interpretative artists. Disclaiming any lofty, "highbrow" attitude, it will endeavor to bring the benefits derived from the arts and letters within the reach of as large a section of the people as possible. It will avoid a narrow chauvinistic obsession with "indigenous" art, but will bend every effort to encourage all young and vital talent. As a part of this objective it will continue to advocate and seek to promote the type of permanent government-sponsored program which is already well established in most of the progressive nations of the world. And above all it will seek to present impartial and constructive criticism based on the highest professional standards, withholding neither praise nor blame.



AMERICA CREATES AMERICAN MURALS

Art Comes Out of Its Traditional Garret
To Bid for the Favor of a New Mass Public



Contrasts in technique are offered by a mural of the older school—Ezra Winter's scene in Wall Street (a detail of which is shown at the left)—and one of the newer projects—Louis Shanker's gay "Circus" (one panel of which is shown above). At the bottom of this page is a modern treatment of local history, a detail from "The Story of Richmond Hill" by Philip Evergood.

AMERICA CREATES AMERICAN MURALS

By ANITA BRENNER

THE World's Fair, said Grover Whalen recently, is going to "take art off Olympus" and make it "part of the warp and woof of the streets." But this is happening already. There are now scores of decorated walls in New York, and scores more being made. They are there because the artists themselves have propagandized so successfully that murals have become the newest architectural fashion. Hardly a building of any pretension goes up that does not include a mural somewhere in its plan. Recently the Museum of Modern Art opened an exhibit that is still another boost for murals; it is a project for the decoration of New York's subway system, put forth by the "Public Use of Art Committee," a group of artists now on WPA.

This is one of the most ambitious and boldest architectural-art ideas that the current agitation for large-scale decoration has produced. Whether it becomes reality depends to a great extent on public opinion of it. Many artists feel that

Art Comes Out of Its Traditional Garret To Bid for the Favor of a New Mass Public

so much of a technical embryo still, that being a muralist is equal to being an explorer, and therein lies much of its fascination to American artists today, even though as a way of making a living it is still largely potential.

A few of New York's architectural artists make a living painting for private patrons—hotels, night clubs or stores. Rates vary upward from around \$500 a panel, and commissions are sporadic. The WPA Federal Art Project, within which most of the recent good work has been done, pays its artists \$23.60 a week. WPA murals usually have to be done in less than six months, since budgeting systems do not permit of long-range planning. The "patron"—that is, the institution decorated—pays for the materials only, if it is tax-supported in whole or in part. The World's Fair, according to Ernest Peixotto, one of its art advisers, expects to

rhythms; that it should be as public as possible, accessible to everybody."

The styles and color-combinations of the Mexicans can be traced in many American murals, too, which is to be expected of every art as it first develops from another. But since the scale of enterprise is so much vaster here, the volume of work done and the number of artists busy far outstrip the Mexican achievement. Whether the ratio of greatness will be as high cannot yet be seen. What we do have is as good a beginning.

THERE is no "tourist handbook" to guide New Yorkers who want to see these murals for themselves. The WPA Federal Art Project has one list. It numbers hundreds of walls. The FWA, which functions under the Treasury Department as a non-relief project employing artists al-



Murals have become "the newest architectural fashion"—Directly above are WPA muralists at work. At right is a new mural in the Mexican manner by Axel Hott, a WPA artist. At top of this page is a detail of a mural on music's history, done by Seymour Fogel for a high school.

architectural art and industrial art are now the only two roads that will lead painting and sculpture out of the garret. They are both arts for the enjoyment of large numbers of people. Both depend for their success on mass popularity. Thus the painter now turns from his artistic isolation. In embracing the large-scale, public types of art he embraces also a new outlook, and bids for a place in public favor alongside the movies, writing, radio, and the other arts of democracy.

MOST of the artists who are now professional "muralists" started in other directions—in no direction at all, most often, except the wish to paint or sculpt and somehow make a living out of it. A few, among the youngest, are trained muralists who learned the medium by apprenticeship to other men, mainly the modern Mexicans, and especially Rivera. Still others have practiced commercial decoration, which taught them the problems of handling rooms, rather than panels, as decorative units. But modern architectural decoration is so young an art,

commission many murals. So far, it has retained a number of men, among them several who did their first large-scale work on WPA.

Radio City really started the boom in murals, though the first important ones in New York were made at the New School for Social Research by Thomas Benton and José Clemente Orozco. The idea came, it is presumed, from the modern Mexicans, Rivera particularly, who had been shouting for years that the true home of modern painting, on a vast public scale, should be the United States and not Mexico. They pointed out that here a great architecture had developed already, and a great variety of tools, materials and techniques with which to create the pictures and sculptures to match it. The ideas of the Mexicans have had a deep influence on the present generation of American artists. They contend that art should be comprehensible to the general public, and should answer popular emotional needs; that it should be massive and heroic and simple, in keeping with industrial forms and





Contrasts in technique are offered by a mural of the older school—Eugene Winter's scene in Wall Street (a detail of which is shown at the left)—and one of the newer projects—Louis Shanker's gay "Circus" (one panel of which is shown above). At the bottom of this page is a modern treatment of local history, a detail from "The Story of Richmond Hill" by Philip Evergood.

ready well-known, has its list too. For the decorations paid for by private capital in hotels, bars, stores and other places there is no list. One finds the good ones by asking the artists, or happens on them by accident.

They are all now so much a part of the New York landscape that if one sets out deliberately to look at, say, ten of the outstanding murals, one travels from the Brown to the Rockefeller. And at times pathetic, maternity and children's wards of busy hospitals; the work-rooms and libraries of technical schools; or beyond the guards at Riker's Island, Ellis Island, and the Women's House of Detention. It takes days. And one emerges in a fatigued whirl, with the mighty picture of New York itself rocketing across the painted symbols of its spirit.

THE first left-motif that strikes the observer is a preoccupation with the quieter, gayer sides of life in this city. People are depicted in leisurely rhythms, the true rhythm of the human race at work. Children, trees, dogs and flowers squeeze in everywhere, like grass cracking through

concrete. They dominate such diverse things as Lucienne Bloch's "Cycle of a Woman's Life," in the House of Detention, and Carl Roters's "Scenes of New York" in Caruso's Restaurant. The first was painted under the Federal Art Project. The second, in one of New York's familiar, unpretentious table d'hotes, according to Roters was an experiment away from "the typical commercial" decoration of such places. The owners were so pleased with it that the experiment is being repeated in other restaurants of the same chain.

A second characteristic soon recognized is emphasis on space and precision, both typical of the American landscape and American design. The ambition of size possesses most the muralists, as if they could find themselves only on a scale of hundreds of feet. The murals at Ellis Island and Riker's Island are both enormous. Reginald Marsh's panels at the Custom House line its huge dome, forty feet up. And the dimensions of space are translated also on relatively small walls, as in Buk Ulrich's decoration of the Woodside Library, which is a lucid masterpiece of architectural design.

A third characteristic is that the subject-matter tends to deal with concrete ideas. Houses, tools, implements, appear with considerable detail, so that an archaeologist could on the basis of these pictures alone reconstruct a great part of our lives. The people, too, are caught with the eye of a "candid" recorder. The interest in concrete ideas, which one might call literal-mindedness, and is due probably to the rational and scientific color in our education, transforms even abstract and surrealist styles to "utilitarian" application.

LOOK, for instance, at the fresco by Erik Mose in the library of the Samuel Gompers High School, a technical school for boys which is part of the public-school system. The central theme of this mural is Light. The artist of two decades ago probably would have pictured light as a Greek lady with a torch, or possibly as Prometheus. Mose, however, has combined cubism with physics. The central "figure" is a stylized abstraction of the sun, seen in design with a prism, which relates to a broad band of color that runs along the top of the mural and is broken up into brilliant stripes—the spectrum.

Beneath this field the artist has made an abstract design of the forms through which we know (Continued on Page 12)



AMERICA DEVELOPS AN AMERICAN MURAL ART

(Continued from Page 11)

light and power. One recognizes spark-plugs, dynamos and such actual electrical machines as a fan. Those forms are all carried out in color-design derived from the spectrum above, and interestingly applied to individual objects such as infra-red, violet ray and other "light" instruments.

Thus the mural, a great field of glowing, angled color that looks, superficially, like something by a cubist, and has the quality of Chartres stained glass, is at the same time an accurate scientific chart. Moreover, it is used as one by the school, and so effectively that almost any boy one may find in the library can explain its design.

Similarly, Walter Quirt has applied surrealism to psychopathology. His murals, which decorate the doctors' conference room in the psychopathic division at Bellevue, describe the images of mental diseases; they are the subjective "visions" and obsessions that accompany each kind of disorder. To the doctors they are all recognizable.

Humor also makes its appearance in most of the murals, usually in some comic detail. Sometimes it is open slap-stick, sometimes sly, as in the portraits of Revolutionary period worthies in Anton Refregier's "Paul Revere" series at the Hotel Lexington. Mayor La Guardia's likeness has been identified among Refregier's figures. Or the hu-

mor turns up in even more sophisticated form, as in Saul Schary's abstractions at Ben Marden's Riviera. Usually it is the dominant element in murals painted for places where many of the spectators are small children, and the really hilarious jobs use modernist informality to achieve their effects. Of these the two most interesting are Max Spivak's decorations at the Astoria Library, and Louis Shanker's panels for the Neponset Beach Hospital.

THE richest vein in the whole development, and one that practically all the artists are following, is experimentation with new materials and techniques. They are doing what the Mexicans long since urged Americans to do—applying industrial instruments and materials to artistic ends. One of the Mexicans, David Alfaro Siqueiros, conducted a workshop laboratory here for a while which generated a strong influence toward these experiments. His group experimented with the use of mechanical equipment such as air-brushes, with which large spaces can be covered quickly; industrial materials like enamel paints baked on metal plates; the application of chemical substances to color, in situ, on synthetic building materials, or reinforced concrete; and so on, through a great variety of potential sources for a new art.

A great many of the WPA

artists are now working along these lines. Robert Cronbach produced a baked terracotta outdoor mural at Brooklyn College. He is one of the group of painters and sculptors who, in collaboration with a chemist, have been trying to devise techniques and materials cheap, rich and durable enough for subway decoration. They have experimented with "silicon ester" painting and other techniques taught to them first by the chemist, and translated into artistic language by the painters. Their most successful product so far is "porcelain enamel." This is an extension of ordinary baked-enamel on metal as used in advertising signs, where it is usually stenciled, to direct painting in the manner of pigment-with-brush. The result has the brilliance and luminosity of an ancient enamel, with the variety of line and tone made possible by the flexible use of the brush.

Space, precision, concreteness, homeliness, humor and imaginative techniques—these are the character-germ of the new American mural art. Its two sources of influence—modern European painting and the Mexican muralists—are strongly apparent, but they come out as if in another key, which is set by American conditions and technical possibilities. Its qualities seem to synthesize the American temperament as it expresses itself in its culture, revealing, above all, vitality.



WNYC'S WPA MURALS

Above—Louis Schanker's painting for the broadcasting station's lobby.

The municipal broadcasting station, WNYC, has been modernized and the reception room on the twenty-fifth floor of the Municipal Building is getting a fine Federal Arts Project mural. Taking a hint from the Rockefeller's Sidewalk Superintendents' Club, WNYC has established a Mural Kibitzers' Club.

Membership is free and almost unrestricted. Just so long as you don't break the one rule you may watch Artists Louis Schanker, Joseph Hochfeld, Miriam Vautel and Albert Fried at their work. You can—and from evidence already gathered, probably will—say: "At least he's got a steady hand." "What is it?" "It must be surrealist." "Whose picture is that?" "It's pretty but I don't understand it."

But on pain of expulsion you must not say, "I may not know art but I know what I like" or "Gosh, I can't even draw a straight line with a ruler."

IN THE REALM OF ART: AS SUMMER'S PANORAMA

ABSTRACTION AND MUSIC

Newly Installed WPA Murals at Station WNYC Raise Anew Some Old Questions

By EDWARD ALDEN JEWELL

LAST Wednesday evening the municipal radio station, WNYC, dedicated, in a broadcast ceremony, a series of murals painted for the station, the Federal Art Project sponsorship, by Louis Schanker, Stuart Davis, Hans Wicht and Byron Browne.

Abstract expression obtains throughout and this, in principle, in practice, contrasts saliently with the photo-murals that, for a long time now, have spread about the walls of the WNYC reception room, a panoramic view of New York City—another difference being that, whereas the excellent photo-murals are in black and white, the new decorations, all of them paintings, are in color.

While each of the artists has worked out his design in his own way, the Federal Art Project informs us that all four of them cooperated closely in the enterprise viewed as a whole, planning the decoration of the entire station, "coordinating architecture, interior decoration, furnishings and the murals" so that these might, together, form "one modern functional entity."

Abstract murals, the WPA message further observes, "are particularly suited for use in a modern broadcasting studio, where everything must contribute to quiet and the uninterrupted function of the broadcast. The studio is a sound-proofed air-conditioned room which must permit concentration during the performance of a program. The abstract mural is the best answer

to these demands, since it not only does not serve as a distraction, but it actually exercises a soothing influence on the observer, through the proper use of form and color."

Now were that all there would be no urgent need, even in the warm, quick season, to devote

wildering far-horizoned terrain these issues command.

THOUGH each of the four murals dedicated last week at WNYC is, in its present context, linked with music, Mr. Schanker's alone has been constructed manifestly on

a basis of musical motif, its abstract forms being symbolic of various instruments and notations.

Attempted classification, in the realm of modern abstract art, entails always an element of danger, so controversial the whole thing has grown to be. Taking a deep breath and plunging, this diver comes up with the reckless opinion that Mr. Schanker's abstract idiom is of the "emotional" type and the three others are "cerebral." Upon the one hand, too, we have an idiom that is quasi-representational and upon the other hand we have an idiom that departs entirely from representation—at least from representation as commonly understood.

These and similar terms have been used so much of late—especially since the Solomon Guggenheim non-objectives were set up in handsome gallery of their own, East Fifty-fourth Street—that it would seem no longer to require elaborate exegesis. The well-thumbed glossary itself must by this time have been memorized by

who have made anything like a serious effort to apprehend what our abstractionists are driving at.

Mr. Schanker paints with real and ingratiating and charming lyricism. He holds valiantly to a melodic line and, throughout his long panel, evinces an appreciation of the emotional impact of music. He modulates, for one thing, much as a composer would who wished to express the emotional development of a thematic mood or to effect the blending of one mood and another.

Baroness Hilla Rebay, curator of the Guggenheim collection, might, of course, protest that Mr. Schanker is on quite the wrong track—that is, if he has any idea of its being a comic track. For she has assured us, if not in just so many words, that to modulate is to defeat the whole nonobjective scheme. But the present artist goes his own untroubled way, painting imaginatively and communicably. Besides, it must be remembered, he does not confine himself, as do the other artists at WNYC, to a hard-and-fast system of "purity," since, as has been observed, his symbol-language is in no strict sense non-objective.

His panel, "Music," is badly lighted and further handicapped by cramped, uncongenial quarters. But in it he makes his point, with feeling, taste and a definite measure of skill.

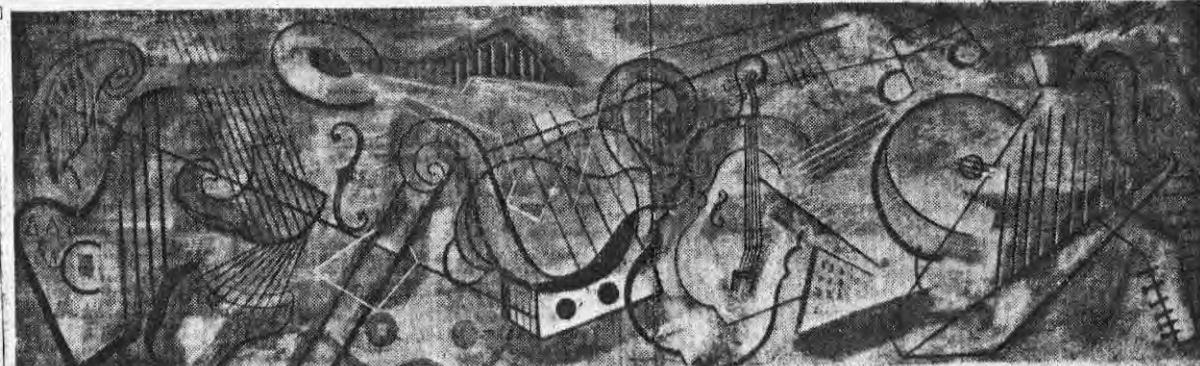
THE other artists paint also with skill, and no doubt they make their points, too, although it strikes me that, in the prepared statements sent around from the

so far as it goes, may seem quite true. But it scarcely goes beyond a consideration of abstract form taken in the most generalizing sense. Artists have so often in the past suggested, this sort of neat geometrical layout of shapes remains always an intellectual exercise, remains always a problem in mechanics, so to speak, by means of which not a vestige of emotion such as magnificently impregnated the music of Bach is communicated.

Indeed, leaving emotion out, on even the technical or, if it be not too cold a word, the mechanical side, it may be questioned how far the proffered analogy holds good. I suppose the artist could to some extent substantiate an assertion (which he does not, in the statement, concretely make) that his design possesses, as does a musical fugue, counterpoint. Yes, of course, there are, repeated in differing sizes and values, circles, squares, parallelograms and triangles. There are the circular and square voices, with their counterparts, asking and answering, if you will. Yet it somehow takes more than this to make counterpoint in a sense that could interchangeably apply both to painting and to music.

In fairness, however, I think it should be suggested that what frequently throws us into confusion is the fact that we try, we spectators, to spin out—supposing it to be, let us say, a whole fugue or other composition—what ought instead to be considered equivalent to just a brief single phrase, or even just a chord.

A GAIN, Stuart Davis speaks of his own



WNYC'S WPA MURALS

Above—Louis Schanker's painting for the broadcasting station's lobby. Below—"Harpist," sculpture by Max Baum.

follows the tonal intervals in music as they are progressively played in a sequence of time. One takes in the composition as a whole and also reacts to the various relations of its parts.

The tonal intervals of music have their counterpart in painting in intervals of tone, color, contrast, size and direction. Spontaneous enjoyment of painting is not as widespread as in the case of music, but this does not mean that people in general are less capable of enjoying painting. I believe it is primarily due to the fact that painting can be and has been used for another purpose than the creation of artistic enjoyment. This other purpose is to tell a story, to instruct, or to convey factual information.

This is a legitimate function of painting and I do not intend anything I have said here as a reflection on the value of storytelling in painting. There is ample room [Mr. Davis concedes] for both kinds, the symphonic and the story-telling, and there are uses appropriate to each.

On listening to a symphony one does not ask what it means. One just listens to it and is moved by it according to the mood of its composition. On looking at a painting, if it is a story-telling picture, there is no need to ask what it means, since it tells you itself. And in looking at a symphonic painting there is also no need to ask what it means, since its meaning lies in the harmonious variety of its color, size and direction intervals. Therefore

tenso. This "symphonic" treatment in art applies every bit as fully in the representational as in the abstract field—or at any rate it may, and it should. Subject matter has, or may and should have, no delimiting effect whatsoever.

We need but look, for a moment, at the design (reproduced) that Mr. Davis has painted for Studio B at the radio station. It is nicely painted. It is more original than are the designs by Mr. Wicht and Mr. Browne. But it seems to me in the true sense not musical, or at least not symphonic. Its development is ragged, episodic and incoherent. The eye may indeed "travel through," but, in my opinion, to no good end. Stuart Davis has himself, in more or less the same abstract idiom, created designs that are more apt, certainly that are more cohesive and unified—though all this should not be taken as tantamount to the assertion that the artist hasn't somewhat entertainingly filled his allotted bit of wall space with a pattern of anecdote.

If Mr. Davis has here painted a symphony, it must be esteemed to no way analogous to any symphony—at least any good one—that I have ever listened to in the concert hall, just as Mr. Wicht, if he gives us Bach at all, gives us Bach without the music.

DESPITE the talk of "function" and "architecture," and "the murals at WNYC"

Controversy Concerning a Coincidence

THOUGH the correspondence published below speaks eloquently for itself, it should be noted that this is one of those strange artistic coincidences that occur at intermittent intervals—if unpremeditated, perhaps once in a century; if not, probably every other day. We leave the final judgment to the reader, remarking only that we shall be delighted to receive and publish any further opinions on the controversy so astutely prompted by Dr. Nathan and so candidly answered by Mr. Schanker.

—Editor.

The Art Historian Criticises:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ART NEWS:

In the edition of June 4, 1938, of THE ART NEWS you reproduced, on page 15, a *Circus* by Schanker, described as "a frolicking panel for the walls of a children's room."

I am sending you a reproduction of one of the works of Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, whose Punchinello series won such wide attention in this country early this year through the Tiepolo exhibition in

The Artist Replies:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ART NEWS:

As Dr. Nathan points out in his interesting letter, there is an unquestionable relationship between the composition of the clown panel in the mural featuring circus life which I did for the children's dining room in the Neponsit Beach Hospital, New York, three years ago, and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's eighteenth century painting of the Punchinello acrobats. This does not mean, however, that my panel—which is one of eleven comprising the whole mural—is by any means a direct copy of the Venetian artist's conception.

I have never seen Tiepolo's originals in Venice or elsewhere. All the sketches for my mural were approved by the Art Commission of New York City in 1935, two years before *Il Casotto dei Pagliacci* was shown in Venice and three years before the Tiepolo exhibition took place in Chicago.

Reproductions of the Venetian clowns were not widely circulated prior to the exhibitions of 1937-1938, as I understand it, though I



(LEFT) G. D. TIEPOLO: "I SALTIMBANCHI" IN THE CA' REZZONICO, VENICE (RIGHT) "CIRCUS," WPA MURAL BY LOUIS SCHANKER

Chicago. This special work, *Il Casotto dei Pagliacci*, was exhibited in the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice in 1937; I do not know whether it is still to be seen there. It shows two clowns somersaulting, and when I first saw Schanker's work I was immediately struck by the close resemblance between the two paintings. In both cases the clown in front raises his legs higher than the one in the back, whose legs in both cases are bent down from the knees on; the placing of the hands, the way their arms cross, the position of the right arm of the front clown rather far from his body, and also the comparative placement of his feet, are nearly identical. The girl holding a fan in Tiepolo's picture with her left arm pointing down is represented in Schanker's work by the clown at right, and even such a detail as the high hat on the right lower corner of Giovanni Domenico's version is repeated on Schanker's panel.

The treatment as a whole, of course, is a transposition into modern ways of seeing, and the group of spectators as well as the Punchinelli to the right of Tiepolo's picture are omitted.

I do not know Mr. Schanker personally, and thus am not informed whether he has been in Italy and seen the work in question, which perhaps struck him by its vivacity and movement. If this is the case, he might perhaps have indicated his source. If he should never

may very well have retained a visual reminiscence of Tiepolo's work from having come across an unidentifiable reproduction at some time that I cannot now clearly recall. In any event, I regret that I have never been able to study his Punchinelli at first hand for he seems to have been both an amusing and dynamic painter, worthy the attention of any modernist, struggling to capture some fleeting note of the universal interplay of action and humor.

However, the reason why I chose the circus as the motive for my series of mural panels had nothing whatever to do with Tiepolo or any other artist. It happens that I ran away from school to join the "big top" and put in two years of interesting but gruelling hard labor as a "canvas-man," "animal ostler" and "property-man" for clowns, acrobats and other performers with one of the best known American circuses. The visual memories that I retain of this period are, needless to say, vivid if not particularly humorous.

Let me add that there is undoubtedly a well-defined genetic pattern in clowning and acrobatics which runs back not only to Tiepolo's eighteenth century but to those ancient "bread and circus" days of the Roman Emperors. The rhythm and rhumb of the art is bound to be more or less repetitive throughout the ages. After all, clowns have only one pair each of arms and legs to work with and

(Continued on page 21)

(Continued on page 21)

The Art Historian Criticizes

(Continued from page 16)

have seen the Tiepolo or a reproduction after it, this would certainly be one of the strangest cases of identical inspiration in art. But close comparison of the two works really makes it hard to believe that such striking resemblances could be mere coincidence.

This would not mean that, even if Tiepolo's interesting work or a sketch taken from it was Mr. Schanker's starting point, his work should be depreciated: it would be rather more interesting as showing the real differences in treatment between an eighteenth century artist and a modernist, and comparison between the two versions could indeed be helpful for a better understanding of modern art.

Yours, etc.,

WALTER L. NATHAN, Ph.D.

Blue Ridge College,
New Windsor, Md.,
August 20, 1938.

The Artist Replies

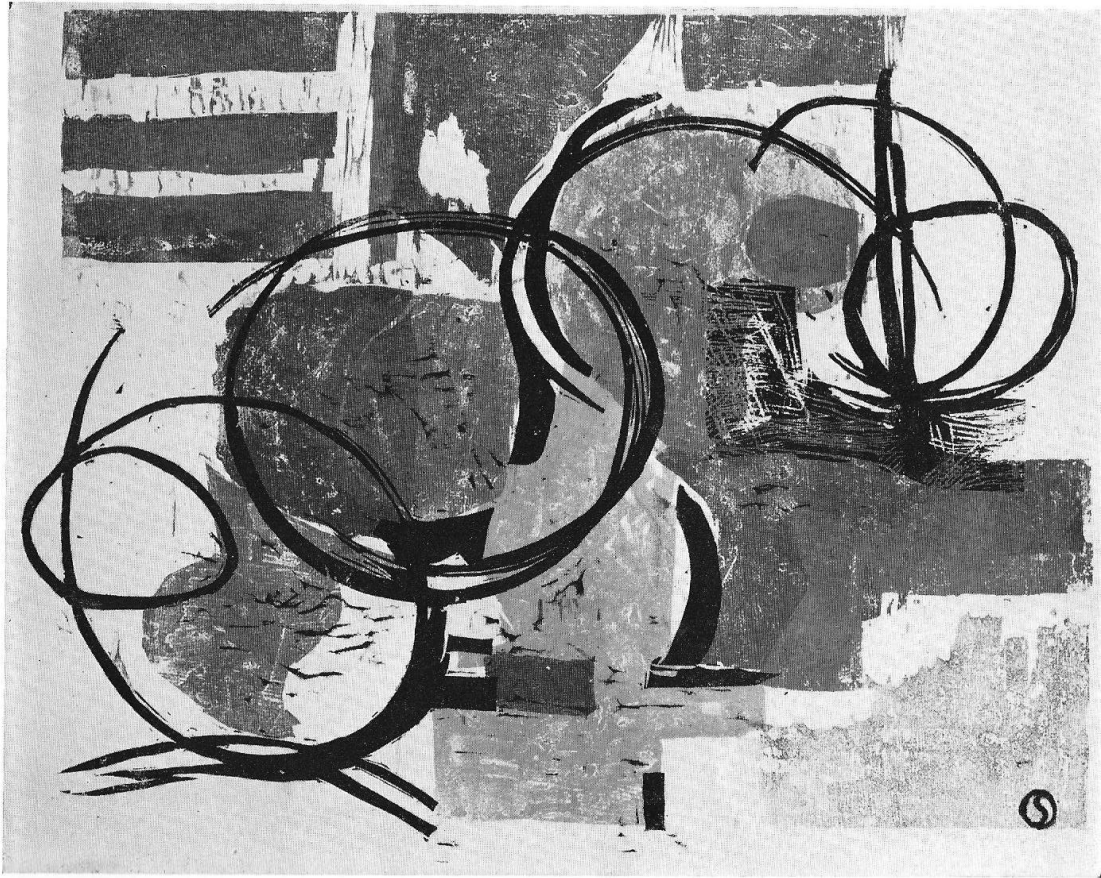
(Continued from page 16)

the attitudes they assume will be alike upon occasion. I have known clowns who were students of the literary and artistic background of their art, one or two who may even have patterned their act upon the same celebrated by Tiepolo. Moreover, from my own observations, I can say that as traditional copyists, clowns are not to be surpassed by any performers in the graphic arts. They do the same tricks over and over, from generation to generation, and everybody loves it. Is it so strange, then, that I should hit upon a clown motive already made famous by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo?

Yours, etc.,

LOUIS SCHANKER

Brooklyn, N. Y.,
October 18, 1938.



9. LOUIS SCHANKER, Circle Image, 1925. Colour woodcut 14½" × 18½"

About Prints S.W. Hayter Oxford University Press, London, 1962

Pg. 21 The print of Louis Schanker, who since the thirties has been one of the most active teachers in this technique, shows certain peculiarities of printing which are typical of this whole school. He headed a print-making project in W.P. A. (a relief scheme set up by Roosevelt during the depression), and from his example the great development of color woodcut in America chiefly stems.

Pg. 118 The block-printer Louis Schanker at the time of my arrival [S.W. Hayter,] in New York in 1940 was still directing a project in print-making under the Works Project Authority: a most imaginative scheme set up under the New Deal to provide subsistence for artists. Directed at the time by a general, having no doubt a thoroughly military ignorance of aesthetics, it always seemed to me the more effective in that it was completely indiscriminate, requiring from its artists nothing but the obligation to work and supplying them with materials and mere subsistence..... Within this organization Schanker inducted a great number of young Americans into the craft of wood-cut - more especially his particular technique of printing from different blocks wet on wet, to give results approaching the richness and complexity of oil painting.

'The 1939 World's Fair' at Gallery

Wash Post

By Joanne Sheehy Hoover

Special to The Washington Post.

"I felt like a jumping bean—elated, thrilled. I could hardly believe my luck," said artist Marguerite Kumm, recalling the day her etching was accepted in the 1939 World's Fair art exhibition in New York. It was the first etching that Kumm, who started out as a painter, had ever done.

Kumm's print, called "Visitor's Gallery," and other works by 100 artists who participated in the New York exhibition currently are on view at the Bethesda Art Gallery in a show entitled "The 1939 World's Fair."

By any measure, the 1939 exhibition was remarkable. It was the most comprehensive gathering of American art up to that time and probably since. Artists from across the nation submitted works to 46 committees representing all the states. Out of some 25,000 works, 1,200 were selected for the show, which was intended to represent the best in contemporary American art.

Talking with Kumm and her fellow printmakers in the Washington area, Prentiss Taylor and I. J. Sanger, whose works also were in the 1939 exhibition, one gets an idea of the artistic excitement of the 1930s.

"The show came at a time when we were getting away from the genteel tradition," said Taylor, who spent part of the 1930s in New York City. "Up until World War I, art came to a great extent from the cultivated class. This began to be superseded by regional work being done by all sorts of people. There was not only a geographical broadening but also a social broadening of the base."

"Social consciousness was in the air," continued Taylor, citing as an example a New York show to which he had contributed that was a protest against the lynching of blacks in the South. Recalling premieres of dances by Martha Graham and music by Aaron Copland, he related an anecdote about the latter.

"Copland had an overture called 'Out on the Streets, May 1.' The Canadian musician, Colin McPhee, came to Copland and said that he, too, had written a socially conscious piece. It was called 'Back into the Houses, May 2,'" said Taylor, chuckling.

"Of course, people went through an awful lot during the Depression in New York," said Taylor in a more serious vein. "I knew five people who committed suicide within three months."

"Artists were in sympathy with what was going on around them because they themselves were going through it," said Sanger, who was part of the WPA

The Arts

Federal Project for the Arts in New York City during the '30s. "They tried to show the unemployed, the strikes in the coal fields. They'd all been through the Depression and were just naturally responding to it."

The WPA arts project put unemployed artists to work producing art for tax-supported institutions such as schools, hospitals and public buildings. It represented the first federal subsidy for the arts.

"The pay wasn't much—only about \$20 a week," recalled Sanger. "But we thought if we were earning something and could do what we wanted to do, that was pretty fine. Besides, in those days we could go to the Waldorf cafeteria in New York and get a veal cutlet for 25 cents and a cup of coffee for 5 cents."

Several prints in the Bethesda Gallery bear the WPA stamp. Unlike some collectors now who prize the stamp, buyers in the '30s were inclined to view the stamp as an undesirable mark of government charity, said gallery owner Betty Minor Duffy. She recalled telephoning artist Louis Schanker to ask if he had a particular print with the WPA stamp on it.

"Let me get this straight," replied an incredulous Schanker. "Are you telling me the customer wants the print only if it has the stamp? I can remember sitting down at a table for hours trying to erase that stamp."

Prices have changed considerably since the '30s as well, said Duffy. In the World's Fair show, prints ranged from \$5 to \$25. In Duffy's exhibit, the prices go from \$25 to \$3,000.

She pointed to a Grant Wood lithograph priced at \$1,200. "Poor Grant Wood. At the time, I'm sure he would have delighted to received \$5 for it. I've just sold it to a museum in New York state that hasn't even seen it."

What has not changed is the special warmth and vibrance of these prints, which have a quality that artist Taylor refers to as the "reality of human pulsation." Whether it is through the compassionate cross-hatching in a coal miner's face, the dark, introspective tone of a New England landscape or the visual mystery of a serviceman's club, the prints seek reality which lies deep within the human spirit.

The show will run through July at the Bethesda Art Gallery. For information on gallery hours, owner Duffy may be reached at 656-6665.

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A NEW YORK DEALER IN SECOND HAND PHONOGRAPH RECORDS AND OLD CROCKERY SELLS WPA ART WHICH HE GOT FROM A JUNK DEALER WHO GOT IT FROM U.S. GOVERNMENT, CIRCA 1944

The hodgepodge of paintings shown in the photo on the back is WPA art. It is a sample of work for which the U.S. government spent about \$35,000,000, from 1935 to 1942, chiefly to keep artists from starving during the depression. Some of the pictures done by these painters were hung in public buildings. Others were just stored in warehouses. The paintings on these pages were piled in a government warehouse in Flushing.

Recently, after the government had liquidated its WPA art project, these pictures were sold for 4¢ a pound to a Long Island junk dealer who thought perhaps the canvas itself might be worth something. Junk dealer in turn sold them to Henry C. Roberts (left) who runs a secondhand bric-a-brac shop on New York's lower West Side. In on time at all the Roberts shop was swamped with art lovers, art dealers and the artists who had painted the pictures. They eagerly bought up the pictures at give-away prices.

from

PAINTINGS FROM THE WPA

HERMAN ROSE LOUIS SCHANKER JOSEPH SOLMAN

February 17 – March 13, 2007

Mercury Gallery Boston