

The Era of the Dust Bowl

September 6th, – October 5th, 2013



7060 State Route 104
Oswego, NY 13126
www.Oswego.edu

This event is free and open to the public. For additional information about this exhibition call the Art Department at 315.312.2113. For persons with disabilities needing assistance to attend this exhibition, please call in advance.

Co-Sponsored by:
the Art Department, ARTSwego, Tyler Art Gallery, and Student Association.

TYLER  GALLERY

Gallery Hours:

Tuesday through Saturday, 11:30 am – 3:00 pm
(closed Sunday, Monday, and school holidays)

“A few good years, with good prices, would be followed by too many horrid years and massive die-offs from drought and winter freeze-ups.”

Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time* (2006), p. 22.

The Era of the Dust Bowl



Charles Cecil Pollock, (American, 1902- 1988)
Skull in a Western Landscape, 1931-32, lithograph,
The Grant Arnold Collection of Fine Art Prints, 74.2. 290

Feeling detached from the European avant-garde and chastened by the Great Depression, many American artists of the 1930's turned to local, often quintessentially American subjects depicted in easily accessible styles. Collectively these artists were dubbed the American Scene Painters. In many ways their work was an extension of the genre painting that flourished in America in the mid-19th century and provides a valuable visual record of American life. They were in fact engaged in a continuing search, one that had existed since the country's birth, for an artistic identity independent from European models. The much less populist and nationalistic style of Abstract Expressionism would finally bring sought after international recognition to American artists during the 1950's.

Sometimes referred to as Regionalism with conservative rural values and imagery or Social

Realism with urban scenes and left-leaning political views, American Scene Painting was intended to be appreciated and understood by the common man and was thus by definition anti-modernist and anti-abstract. Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) along with Grant Wood (1891-1942) of *American Gothic* fame, are perhaps the best remembered of these artists today.

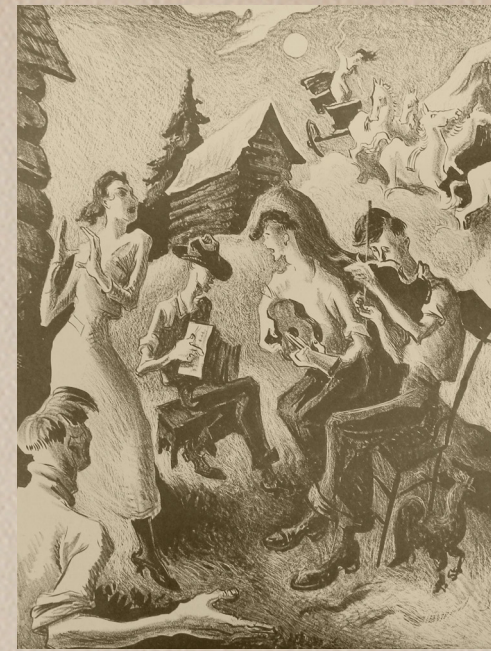
Regionalist artists are well represented in the twenty-two lithographs from the Grant Arnold Collection of Fine Art Prints seen here. Thomas Hart Benton's *She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain, Ozark Musicians*, 1931, though appearing stylistically "modern", with its dynamic, undulating forms, in fact harkens back to the artist's encounters with Baroque art when he was a student in Paris, starting around 1908. Benton was an avowed, outspoken anti-modernist. Here Benton celebrates the folk music and social life of the Ozark region. Appropriate to the music and dancing depicted, each form is enlivened and seems to embody motion; no area of the composition seems unaffected by this spirit of communal joy.

Charles Cecil Pollock (1902- 1988) was originally committed to the Regionalist style and ideals but, like his younger brother Jackson, he later abandoned it in favor of an abstract approach. Both also studied painting with Thomas Hart Benton. In *Skull in a Western Landscape*, 1931-32, Pollock places a sun-bleached cow skull unnervingly close to the viewer with a low point of view surveying the arid landscape. Unlike Benton, Pollock acknowledges the human trials of the era; though a rancher is not pictured, his misfortune is suggested by the loss of valuable livestock.

The federal government began several relief programs that directly benefited artists during the Great Depression.



Arthur Rothstein (American, 1915-1985)
Wife and Child of a sub-marginal Farmer Looking through their Window (Mrs. Deacon and Daughter), 1937 (1984 reprint) black and white photograph, College Purchase from Library of Congress, 84.7.32



Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889-1975), *She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain, Ozark Musicians*, 1931 lithograph, The Grant Arnold Collection of Fine Art Prints, 74.2. 59

Baldovin, Joshua Walrath and Exanne Lennon. Their emotion-filled visual solutions convey a requisite understanding of the mood of the period.

Several students and others played key roles in the planning and preparation of The Era of the Dust Bowl:

Marci Zebrowski acted as co-curator providing capable and invaluable assistance in all key areas of this exhibition including selecting artworks and textual quotations, exhibit design and preparation of artworks. Kelly Brodeur showed creativity and patience in designing the many print materials associated with this exhibition. History graduate student Jon Zella composed a historical overview of the 1930's to place these artworks in a more meaningful context. Hannah McHale prepared a lobby display case on a New Deal art mural in the Fulton, New York Post Office. Cynthia Clabough and Mindy Ostrow oversaw the creation and selection of student ORI posters. Toni Burrows assisted in preparation of artworks for display and Barbara Lyman generously lent her horse-drawn plow for the exhibition.

Funding was provided by ARTSwego and the Student Association/ Student Art Exhibition Committee.

Michael Flanagan, Director
Tyler Art Gallery

Starting in 1935, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) employed photographers to document American life including its hardships. The program resulted in often iconic images by gifted photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. This exhibition contains thirty-six photographs by the three FSA photographers who came to Oswego County: Arthur Rothstein (1915-1985), Marjorie Collins (1912-1985) and John Collier (1913-1992). Though some of their work documents relatively mundane locations and war-related formalities, Rothstein's austere and moving *Wife and Child of a sub-marginal Farmer Looking through their Window (Mrs. Deacon and Daughter)*, 1937 demonstrates that abject poverty was not limited to the dust bowl states.

On view in The Era of the Dust Bowl is the short film *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. Directed by Pare Lorentz and funded by the United States Resettlement Administration, this film was considered controversial upon its release in 1936. Seen by some as mere propaganda for President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal relief programs, the film nonetheless captures the stark beauty of the Great Plains, the resiliency of its citizens and the scope of this epic natural disaster.

Also presented in this exhibition are posters promoting the 2013 Oswego Reading Initiative book *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan and created by graphic design students Aimee Anno, Julia



Julia Baldovin, *The Worst Hard Time Oswego Reading Initiative Poster*, digital print, 2013