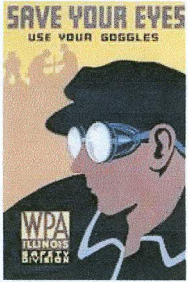


WPA Posters 1936-1943 – Art from the New Deal

May 24, 2010 [Kristin Hanneman](#)



WPA Poster, FAP Illinois, 1936 or 1937 - *Library of Congress (Public Domain)*

Posters created for the Depression-era Works Projects Administration established an influential American graphic art style.

In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (later changed to the Works Projects Administration) as one part of the sweeping New Deal initiative to create jobs for unemployed Americans. In July of that year, Federal Project Number One was organized to provide funds for a variety of artistic endeavors. Each discipline had its own division: The Federal Writer's Project, the Federal Art Project, the Federal Theatre Project and the Federal Music Project.

Creating the WPA Poster Divisions

The Federal Art Project (FAP) employed artists to paint murals for public buildings, to educate the public in the arts and to create posters for all the projects of Federal One, other WPA divisions such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, and state and local governments.

The first Poster Division was formed in New York. Originally a part of the Civil Works Administration of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, it was subsumed by the WPA Federal Art Project. By 1938 Poster Divisions had been established in 17 states and the District of Columbia.

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Producing the Posters

Initially, the posters were individually drawn and lettered. Although some of the posters were woodcuts and lithographs, most were printed with the silkscreen process.

Having learned the process while working at a department store in New York, FAP artist Anthony Velonis convinced the WPA administrators that poster output could be substantially increased by silkscreen production methods. Workshops were organized to teach the method to other WPA poster artists. Soon it was possible to print as many as 600 posters in a day.

Goals of the WPA Posters

The primary purpose of the posters was to publicize and promote a number of initiatives:

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- health and safety issues
- cultural events such as art exhibitions, concerts and theatrical performances
- education programs such as parenting, health care, job training and children's art classes
- travel and tourism in the United States
- community activities

Ennis Carter, author of the 2008 book *Posters for the People* sums up the project's impact: "Even today, the posters of the WPA still achieve their original goals. They call attention to important social issues and values through beautiful and meaningful design. These posters may be 75 years old, but they still touch our lives and inspire us even today."

Raising the Poster to an Art Form

The WPA posters are fine examples of graphic art, showing influences of Art Deco, Bauhaus and proletarian art of the Soviet Union. Richard Floethe, head of the New York Poster Division, wrote in a 1930s essay of a surprising result of the WPA Federal Art Project: "the government unwittingly launched a movement to improve the commercial poster and raise it to a true art form."

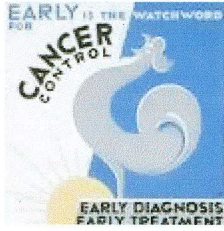
It has been estimated that over two million posters were printed from 35,000 different designs over the course of the WPA's history. Only 2,000 are known to have survived. The largest single collection of WPA posters is at the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C. Other repositories include the National Archives, the Historic New Orleans Collection, numerous museums, university archives, historical societies and private collections.

Ennis Carter launched the [WPA Living Archive](#) in 2009 to give collectors and the general public the opportunity to provide information on hitherto unknown examples of WPA posters.

Sources:

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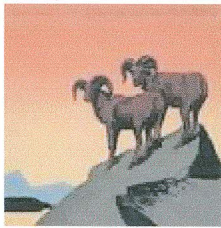
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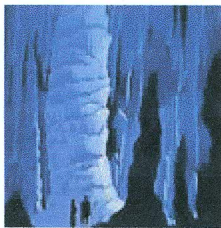
WPA Poster, FAP New York, 1936 to 1938 - *Library of Congress (Public Domain)*



WPA Poster, FAP New York, 1936 - *Library of Congress (Public Domain)*



WPA Poster, FAP New York, 1936 to 1939 - *Library of Congress*



WPA Poster, FAP New York, 1936 to 1939 - *Library of Congress (Public Domain)*

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