

Ben Shahn and the Federal Art Project

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Introduction

The New York Stock Exchange crash of October 1929 led to the unprecedented Great Depression. In cities, this phenomenon caused one in four workers to lose their jobs, resulting in lines of starving people waiting for a bowl of soup at free food serving stations. The fall in the price of agricultural produce and fear for the agriculture industries became severe. Several people in towns and villages faced repossession of their land or property due to escalating debts. The gravity of this kind of threat to society shook popular culture in the US and became a significant turning point in the world of arts and literature.

In the early 20th century, art in the US gave rise to paintings of daily life such as those of the Ashcan School; however, in comparison to writers, artists were extremely isolated from society. Furthermore, according to the traditions of Victorianism, which values emotional restraint and a strong work ethic, majority of people were far removed from the field of fine arts. However, as the flowers of popular culture bloomed with the prosperity of the 1920s, even those involved in the field of fine arts and familiar with the 'Paris Pilgrimage' began to reconsider America's own unique culture. Ben Shahn (September 1898-March 1969) was one of these people.

The outbreak of the Depression rocked the foundations of Eurocentric artistic tradition and Victorianism, and artists who had lost the chance to express themselves began to focus inevitably on the range of social problems caused by the struggles. Among them were people who felt that art should have a social objective. This led to feeling that art should offer some kind of message to society by making an ethical and emotional contribution.¹

As a result, an art project was established as part of the New Deal public works policy and artists were commissioned to produce work, enabling the relief program to protect their livelihood to some extent. Shahn took part in this New Deal Art Project and typified those artists whose paintings revealed the lives of those suffering from the Depression. It is no exaggeration to say that due to the unprecedented Depression and New Deal Art Project, Shahn, who returned to the US from Paris soon after the stock market crash, became the definitive social artist of the US.² The US was already the birthplace of social artists known as 'The Eight' at the beginning of the 20th century; however, it is more appropriate to say that Shahn, who faced the Great Depression, represents the 'social realists' who were influential until after World War II.³

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Chapter 1 Return to the US and the shock of the Great Depression

Shahn met several artists in Paris and produced sketches and drawings of the scenery and the female figure; however, having witnessed life in the Brooklyn slums, the art in Paris began to seem gaudy to him and eventually he turned away from European modernism. Later, when recalling his experiences in Paris, he claimed that ‘The French school of painting doesn’t suit me...It is absolutely of no use,’ and through his observations of the conditions in his society he began to think that ‘people’ and their ‘stories’ were something precious and should be drawn. During that period, Shahn expressed his feelings towards art as follows: ‘Faced with what is being done and what is happening at the moment, I am unable to detach art from my emotions.’⁴

Section 1 The trial of Sacco and Vanzetti and the impact of ‘panic.’

It is said that reading documents related to the 1894 Dreyfus affair in France provided Shahn with an opportunity to approach social themes; however, he was struck by another high profile social incident in the US itself. This was the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti.⁵

In January 1920, in the US, disturbing elements were arrested in thousands as social anxiety caused by the ‘Red Scare’ swept over the entire nation. In April of the same year, two Italian immigrants Nicola Sacco, an impoverished shoe-maker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fishmonger, were arrested for the murder of a paymaster and a security guard at a shoe factory in South Braintree on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts. The fact that they were draft dodgers, atheists, and anarchists took precedence over the details of the investigation and trials, and they were sentenced to death as early as the following year.⁶

International opinion centered on the trade unions and the liberalist movement admonished the US justice authorities and demanded the acquittal of the two men. Demonstrations took place in the UK, France, Italy, Russia, Latin America, and several countries around the world, and well-known cultural and intellectual people such as H.G. Wells, Albert Einstein, Harry S. Lewis, and John Dos Passos also took part in the protests. As the campaign to save them gathered momentum, their execution was postponed; however, on the basis of the conclusions of the reexamination of the incident, the two men were sentenced to the electric chair in August 1927.⁷

Shahn went to Boston twice to take part in demonstrations prior to the execution, and on the actual day of the execution, he wandered the streets of New York in tears. The event had a big impact on Shahn that and when looking back on it after 30 years, he described the creative urge built up inside him during that period as follows.

‘Looking back, I imagined how fortunate it must be- how fortunate I would feel -to be alive during a momentous era, a period of major events like Christ’s suffering. Then suddenly, I realized how fortunate I was. I was alive during another era of suffering. *There was something that needed to be drawn.*’⁸ (Italics added for emphasis)

Towards the end of 1929, Shahn left the painting circles of Paris and returned to the US. Ironically, October of that year saw the unprecedented slump in value of the New York Stock

Exchange and the beginning of the Great Depression, a period of decline unequalled in history. For Shahn, who observed the lines for free bread, huts made of paper and tin, soup kitchens, and people selling apples in shabby clothes, the 1920s economic prosperity and the ostentation of popular culture seemed ever more pretentious. As a result, Shahn's desire to remain on American soil grew stronger as did the urge to create work that had 'man' and 'his life' as its motif while exploring the relationship between the self and society.⁹

Section 2 Early work and style

1) Dreyfus Affair Series

The Dreyfus affair was a case of false accusation that occurred towards the end of the 19th century in France.¹⁰ Shahn collected several documents related to the case while in Paris and devoted himself to reading them on his return to the US. In 1931, Shahn completed the 'Dreyfus Series' of 13 watercolors, marking the first of his works that dealt with social issues. Then, in the summer of 1931, together with his friend, photographer Walker Evans, Shahn rented a neighbor's shed in Greenwich Village to exhibit the 'Dreyfus Series,' taking a step toward the use of social themes as a motif for his work. Looking back at those days, Shahn says, "I wanted to represent the incident as a painting... I knew that the Dreyfus paintings would open avenues to new forms of expression."¹¹

When painting social issues, Shahn wanted to 'simplify' where possible to create a strong image. Within this series, works such as *Esterhazy* and *Paleologue et Demange* (both 1930) are good examples of this technique and style of painting, and the emotional words written at the bottom of the painting express Shahn's feelings towards this incident. Shahn describes how this series "paved a way for my very individual way of thinking to develop without losing its simplicity."¹²

2) Sacco Vanzetti Series

With extraordinary ardor, Shahn then focused on the Sacco and Vanzetti trials, and in little over a year, he produced 23 gouache paintings and two panels. This series was displayed in the Downtown Gallery and the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art among others and left a profound impression on several people.¹³ Shahn established his status in the world of American art as a result of this series.

The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti is composed of the following three sections: 1) Sacco and Vanzetti, who were arrested, 2) the committee appointed to review the trial, led by Harvard University President Abbott L. Lowell, and 3) inside the court before the announcement of the judgment. The cold objectivity seen in the style of this series is the result of the intense social consciousness that Shahn put into his work, and constantly in the background is Shahn's indignation over the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

However, since a mere glance does not reveal that this is a series of vivid images that highlights the social element of this frame-up case, it was not well received during that period. For example, despite the fact that this was an incident that caused so much public consternation and affected Shahn himself, the figures in the paintings are expressionless, and there is even a carefree element to Sacco and Vanzetti.¹⁴

It is certainly true that Shahn's inner emotions merely seep obscurely through this mesh of 'objectivity' that records the facts and that he does his best to prevent his emotions of

protest and rage from erupting through his work. However, as Yoshiaki Tono pointed out, this method of using caricature and 'simplification' to strengthen the social effect and distancing oneself from making the painting a platform for explosions of simple, exaggerated emotion such as rage, shouting, and disillusionment should be seen as the stance of a cool-headed documentarist.¹⁵

By using such deliberate 'simplification,' Shahn was aiming to pursue strong inspiration and he thought of it as a requiem for Vanzetti, who said before his execution 'This final moment is ours, this pain is our victory.' In later years, Shahn described how he painted 'with as much simplicity as possible', and how the work of the great Italian painter of the Middle Ages, Giotto di Bondone, inspired him to produce work that was 'simple' in places but which represented a living 'story' when viewed as a whole.¹⁶

3) Tom Mooney Series

On 22 July 1916, in a climate of hysteria, a bomb was detonated in San Francisco during a parade to celebrate the United States' imminent participation in World War I, killing nine people and causing over 40 casualties. Although this incident is now known to have been fabricated by local police authorities, four men were held responsible and arrested, and ringleaders Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings were sentenced to death. An upsurge of international protests in Latin America, Europe, and the Soviet Union as well as the United States itself forced the California State Governor to reduce the sentence to life imprisonment.¹⁷

In 1932, still extremely emotional post the Sacco and Vanzetti Series, Shahn completed 15 gouache and tempera pieces, in which he painted the accused and their parents, the witnesses who pleaded their innocence, and the pompous figures of authority. These pieces were displayed in the Downtown Gallery in May 1935 as the *Tom Mooney Series*. In the midst of a social crisis worsened by unemployment levels of around 12m people, Shahn rose up and applied himself to this project as a public reminder of an incident which took place around ten years ago. Shahn worked on the series from the Presidential elections of November 1932 until the beginning of the New Deal in March of the following year, and his perception of the public's increasing despair and its expectations of the new Roosevelt administration led to his use of bright colors and bold compositions, which further refined Shahn's cynical and satirical outlook.¹⁸

The Mexican painter Diego Rivera was impressed by Shahn's *Tom Mooney Series* and employed him as an assistant during the production of his own work, the *Man at the Crossroads* mural, at the RCA Building in New York's Rockefeller Center.¹⁹ Completion of the mural was postponed; however, Rivera saw something common in the *Tom Mooney Series* and the characteristic vitality and emblematic and religious expression of Mexican murals, and Shahn's work convinced him that art should play a role in society and not merely be a goal in itself. For Shahn himself, the encounter with Rivera was extremely influential and would in time give him the opportunity to work on murals as part of the New Deal art policy.

In the early days of the Great Depression, Shahn produced the *Dreyfus Series*, the *Sacco and Vanzetti Series*, and the *Tom Mooney Series*. The two former works were displayed in the Downtown Gallery and the Harvard Society of Contemporary Art. The *Sacco and Vanzetti Series* in particular provoked a nationwide reaction, and confirmed Shahn's reputation among the 'social realists' whose paintings describe the universality of social issues. It is said that Bernarda Bryson, whom Shahn would later marry, was deeply impressed with the *Sacco and Vanzetti Series* at the Downtown Gallery.

Edith G. Halpert of the Downtown Gallery was initially hesitant to show work that had such a strong socialist element; however, on Cahill's recommendation, the *Sacco and Vanzetti Series* was shown for a period of two weeks. As a result, the *Sacco and Vanzetti Series* gained huge popularity, and people rushed to buy this work of which most was sold. The Downtown Gallery's reputation was also enhanced by the exhibition, and it showed signs of changing from a gallery that followed modernism to one that dealt with socialist paintings. Halpert began to stress on the significance of 'themed' and 'storytelling' paintings as opposed to 'art for art's sake' and this fitted perfectly with Shahn's approach.²⁰ When one considers that this was the period when the Depression was becoming extremely serious and several artists were suffering, Shahn had made a fine start.

1. Matthew Baigell, *The American Painting of the 1930's* (New York: Praeger, 1974); Milton W. Brown, *American Paintings: From the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).
2. Erica Beckh, "Government Art in the Roosevelt Era," *Art Journal*, 20 (Fall 1960), pp. 2-8; Robert C. Vitz, "Struggle and Response: American Artists and the Great Depression," *New York History*, 57 (January 1976), pp. 81-98; Donald J. Hagerty, "Hard Times, New Images: Artists and the Great Depression Years in California," *Pacific Historian*, 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 11-19.
The Files and Papers of Ben Shahn are as follows. N.Y. Brooklyn Museum, Ben Shahn File; Columbia University, Oral History Collection, Ben Shahn Interviews; N.Y. Museum of Modern Art, Ben Shahn File; N.Y. Whitney Museum of American Art, Ben Shahn File; Saint Louis Art Museum, Archives; Archives of American Art, Ben Shahn Papers; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Ben Shahn File; National Archives, Farm Security Administration Administrator Correspondence, 1935-1938, Record Group 96, AD 86-987, 994.
3. Grant Holcomb, "John Sloan and 'McSorley's Wonderful Saloon,'" *American Art Journal*, 15-2 (Spring, 1983), pp. 4-20; St. Bruce John, "Sloan in Philadelphia, 1888-1904," *American Art Journal*, 3-2 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 80-87; The Brooklyn Museum, *Notes From The Eight* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum Press, 1943).
4. James T. Soby, Ben Shahn (West Drayton: Penguin Books, 1947); James T. Soby, "Ben Shahn," *Graphics*, 4-22 (1948), pp. 102-107; Ben Shahn, *The Biography of a Painting* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1956); Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 98 (*The Shape of Content*, translated by Akira Sato, Bijutsu shuppan, 1959, p.101). Yasuo Kamon, *Painting America-Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Ben Shahn* [Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Ben Shahn Exhibition] (Tokyo Shinbunsha, 1981).
5. *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings, 1920-7*. 5 Vol. (Mamaroneck, N.Y.: P.P. Appel, 1969). <http://www.courtstv.com/archive/greatesttrials/sacco.vanzetti/>
6. Louis G. Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: Harcourt, Bruce, 1948). Masamichi Morikawa, *Sacco and Vanzetti Affair* (San-ichi Shobo, 1977). Shinzaburou Okonogi, *Frame-up* (Iwanami Shoten, 1983), chapter 3. Professor Frankfurter of Harvard University, who was subsequently involved intensely in the New Deal policy, is said to have been deeply concerned over the Sacco and Vanzetti trials.
7. Felix Frankfurter, *The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Boston: Harpers, 1927); Osmond K. Frankel, *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (New York: Vikings, 1931); Herbert B. Ehrmann, *The Case That Will Not Die: Commonwealth vs. Sacco Vanzetti* (New York: Beacon Press, 1961). Yuko Matsumoto, "Concerning the Judgement of Sacco and Vanzetti," ed. by Akira Imazu and others, *The Quest for Citizen Freedom-Inter-War America* (Tokyo: Sekai Shisho-sha, 1985).
8. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1956-1957* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 99 (*The Shape of Content*, translated by Akira Sato, Bijutsu shuppan, 1959, p.102). A movie, Sacco and Vanzetti, was released in 1970.

9. Roger Biles, *The New Deal and the American People* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1991); John F. Bauman and Thomas H. Coope, *In the Eye of the Great Depression: New Deal Reporters and the Agony of the American People* (Springfield: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988); Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: A Division of Random House, 1970).
10. Kazutami Watanabe, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1972). Pierre-Michael, translation by Kazutami Watanabe, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1960). Michio Inaba, *The Dreyfus Affair and Zola* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1979). Takeshi Takemura, *The Dreyfus Prison Diaries* (Tokyo: Chuo University Press, 1979).
11. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, p. 88 (aforementioned translation p.19). Until now it has been said that the Dreyfus Series was completed in 1930; however, recent research shows that it was completed in 1931. Howard Greenfeld, *Ben Shahn: An Artist's Life* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 69-71.
12. James T. Soby, *Ben Shahn* (West Drayton, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 11; Ben Shahn, *ibid.*, p. 101 (aforementioned translation p. 23-24). Ben Shahn, *Biography of a Painting*, pp. 34-39.
13. In addition to the Downtown Gallery, the Harvard Society of Contemporary Art is also important. Diane Tepfeter, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery Downtown 1926-1940: A Study in American Art Patronage," Ph.D. dissertation (The University of Michigan, 1989). Fumihisa Matsumoto, *Minority Artists of the US-Dreaming of a Multicultural Society* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2001) pp. 19-20.
14. It is believed that Shahn's status rose as a result of the themes in the Sacco and Vanzetti Series. Alejandro Anreus, ed., *Ben Shahn and the Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Jersey City: Jersey City Museum, 2001).
15. Yoshiaki Tono, *Ben Shahn-Man and Artist*, 'Collection of World Masterpieces' vol. 16 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1962), p. 23. Robert P. Weeks, ed., *Commonwealth vs. Sacco and Vanzetti* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1958).
16. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, p. 77 (aforementioned translation p.18); Walter Gutman, "The Passion of Sacco-Vanzetti," *The Nation* (April 20, 1932); Louis Joughin, "25 Years since Sacco and Vanzetti," *The Nation* (August 23, 1952), p. 152.
17. Mooney (January 7, 1939) and Billings (October 8, 1939) were both acquitted. Ernest J. Hopkins, *What Happened in the Mooney Case* (New York: Brewer and Warren, 1932); Curt Gentry, *Frame Up: The Incredible Case of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings* (New York: George Braziller, 1967); Richard H. Frost, *The Mooney Case* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968). Shinzaburo Okonogi, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.
18. Yoshiaki Tono, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Yasuo Kamon, *op. cit.*, p. 2. David Shapiro, ed., *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973); Ben Shahn, "What Is Realism in Art?" *Look* (January 13, 1953), pp.44-45; James T. Soby, *Ben Shahn*, pp. 27-31. In comparison to the Sacco and Vanzetti Series, the Tom Mooney Series includes more vivid colors such as green, pink, and yellow, and the composition is bolder. As a whole, this can be seen as a further refinement of Shahn's cynical and satirical outlook.
19. It made a comparison between capitalism and socialism, and Lenin was idealized. Howard Greenfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-117.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-76. In addition to Shahn's Sacco and Vanzetti Series, Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* (1940-41) also contributed to the Downtown Gallery's renown as a venue for socialist paintings. Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1986), pp. 63-64; Diane Tepfeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Chapter 2 New Deal Art Project

Section 1 Background to the Art Project

An old friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Groton School and Harvard University alumnus, George Biddle, wrote to the President in a letter dated May 9, 1933 with a proposal for the government to provide support for public art activities and to encourage public work and unemployment relief.¹

Biddle's proposal was to employ out-of-work artists to decorate government buildings with murals and other work. Also, seeking the advice of the Assistant Treasury Secretary, Lawrence W. Robert, he described his plan to the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, and a number of senators including the Labor Secretary, Francis Perkins, the Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes, and the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Rexford G. Tugwell.

Roosevelt himself established the Gibson Committee during his time as the Governor of New York State, and since he had experience in providing economic aid to workers and artists, he was sympathetic to Biddle's plan.² Roosevelt then put Biddle's art project to the National Commission of Fine Art; however, he also said that it would be impossible for a President to support the kind of artists who might paint a portrait of Lenin on the courthouse wall, thus, the plan had little initial success.³

Having been consulted by Biddle, the Assistant Treasury Secretary, Senator Robert, sought the opinion of Edward Bruce, an artist who worked in the Treasury as an international finance expert. Bruce supported Biddle's idea and began to plan the financial terms of the art project. Although Bruce and Biddle were unable to get the support that they had initially expected from the treasury, they did manage to get backing from the Chief of the Public Works Administration (PWA), self-styled 'friend of art,' Harold L. Ickes. As funds for the project, Ickes requested the Chief of the Civil Works Administration (CWA), Harry L. Hopkins, to direct a part of the budget allocated to the relief agency from PWA to the Treasury.⁴

Bruce believed that an art project on behalf of the Federal Government would boost the significance of the New Deal and along with Senator Robert he proposed an advisory committee composed of art experts and gallery representatives. The Advisory Committee was launched with Roosevelt's uncle, Frederic A. Delano, as its chief, Hopkins and Bruce as coordinators, and Bruce in particular played a central role in implementing the project, which he called the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).⁵

Biddle, who initially proposed the art project, had never been interested in law, his father's occupation, and after traveling in Europe and Latin America, he studied Mary Cassatt and Rivera and began to follow the path of art. In fact, it was Biddle's awareness of the Mexican government's practice of painting murals to raise public consciousness that led him to propose the art project.

By having murals painted on public buildings, the Mexican government established the principles of the Mexican Revolution, and this mural movement was in the process of representing the biggest national school since the Renaissance in Italy. The Mexican mural movement is a fusion of ancient Mayan and Aztec civilization and modern murals, which created a unique, popular style and also played an important role in the formation of a popular Mexican identity. Artists such as Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are well known as the flag bearers of the mural movement.⁶

The style and motifs of the Mexican murals had a huge influence on young American artists such as Mitchell Siporin, Boardman Robinson and Anton Refregier. Although the depression was a period of crisis, it forced upon them the opportunity to look into the origins of traditional American culture and create a modern artistic style. In other words, this was nothing less than rejecting the simple imitation of European Modernism to create a unique American cultural identity for the benefit of society.⁷

Therefore, we conclude that these developments in the American art scene and the unprecedented depression were the circumstances in which the New Deal art project began.

Section 2 Beginnings of the Art Project

1) Public Works of Art Project (PWAP)

The Roosevelt administration established the CWA on November 9, 1933, appointing Harry Hopkins as Chief, and began large-scale relief for the unemployed. The CWA created around 400,000 short-term work projects in fields ranging from construction and civil engineering to education and art, employing over 4m people by January 1934. This was a great success, resulting in the construction of roads, schools, airports, sports grounds, parks, and swimming pools.

The PWAP began in December 1933 as part of the CWA unemployment relief project. The PWAP wanted impoverished artists to produce work with an American-style scene as its theme, the plan being to decorate public facilities such as parks, stations, post offices, and courthouses with paintings, sculptures, and murals.

On December 8, 1933, there was a meeting of the Advisory Committee at Robert's house in which Bruce and the directors of over 12 renowned galleries discussed how to run the PWAP. Bruce explained his plan to establish the headquarters of the PWAP at the Treasury in Washington and to manage the project by dividing the country into districts. The leaders of the district committees elected by the headquarters would then be given the authority to choose and manage their artists. Bruce went on to describe how the PWAP would employ artists to decorate a range of public facilities according to a 3-tier weekly wage structure, with 1,500 people on \$35-45, 1,000 people on \$20-30, and 500 people on \$15.⁸

Following the Advisory Committee meeting, the CWA Chief Hopkins announced that the management and administration of the PWAP's public works for unemployment relief would be based on CWA policies, and that the CWA would allocate a budget of \$1,034,754 for the PWAP. This efficiency was a result of Hopkins' experience in supporting artists when he was Chief of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration during Roosevelt's governorship of New York State.⁹

The PWAP was, therefore, launched with its headquarters in the Treasury in Washington, comprising Robert as General Manager and consultant to the Advisory Committee, Bruce as Chief, art critic Forbes Watson as Technical Director, and Edward B. Rowan as Vice-Technical Director. The PWAP was founded by the government as a democratic scheme that aimed to support artists nationwide, thereby unearthing young, unknown artists and creating a deeper understanding of art in society. The CWA divided the PWAP into 16 districts nationwide, and the elected directors of the district committees were handed the role of promoting the scheme. The district committees then recruited and selected artists while the headquarters in Washington, respecting the individuality of each district, did not get directly involved in the administration of the project.¹⁰

Juliana Force of the Whitney Museum's American Painting Department was appointed Director of the New York district committee. During that period, there were around 4,000 artists on the relief register in Manhattan alone; however, in February 1934, PWAP allocated only 500 artists to New York City, and after a two-week period of provisional employment involving 722 artists, the district committee was forced to release 208.¹¹

From the PWAP headquarters, Bruce requested the artists to provide sketches with American scenes as the central theme, prior to offering them a contract, and he set out the selection policy to register artists with the Civilian Conservation Corps and the public utilities

project. Regarding wages provided by the PWAP, Bruce announced that there would be a two-tier scale according to the artists' experience and financial needs.¹²

However, there was some confusion within the PWAP regarding the standard of employed artists, and the directors of district committees were extremely troubled over deciding the base employment on the artists' experience and ability or the extent of his financial difficulty. The PWAP directors were unable to come to a conclusion on this point. Robert believed that artists should be hired simply on the basis of being unemployed, while Bruce and Watson, who proposed to raise the standard of the artwork, stressed the need to judge according to the individual's nature and skill.¹³

Several artists were suffering great hardship and they wanted their economic situation to take priority in decisions regarding employment; thus, there was no end to their conflict with the directors of PWAP's district committees. Furthermore, since there was no established artistic standard for the American-style scene that would be the theme of the work, even if experience and ability had been used as the criteria for employment, it would have been extremely difficult for the district committees to judge. This was an issue that related to the fundamental point of the art project itself: whether the PWAP was simply a relief project for unemployed artists or rather a scheme devised by the government to promote the arts.¹⁴

The PWAP was granted two months of supplementary funds and continued its activities until the end of June 1934; however, due to the increasing criticism over the CWA's rapid expansion,¹⁵ it became necessary to reduce the number of artists on the payroll by half before May. Therefore, Robert appealed to a range of administrative agencies about the significance of the PWAP, and to secure funding to promote the art project further, he decided to hold a large-scale exhibition in April 1934 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington.¹⁶

To guarantee the success of the Corcoran exhibition, in March 1934, Bruce requested that the directors of each district committee send their best work for display, and gave a strong reminder that no local exhibitions were to be held in rivalry against Washington. In order to establish the PWAP exhibition as the greatest art event since the 1905 Armory Show, Watson summoned all the manpower of the PWAP headquarters and took charge of collecting and displaying the best work. When the Corcoran exhibition opened in April 1934, there were some 600 paintings chosen by Bruce and Watson from more than 1,500 pieces.

President Roosevelt had a private viewing of the Corcoran PWAP exhibition for 90 minutes, and he was so impressed with the quality of the work on display that he decided to decorate the White House with 32 paintings, 25 of which were chosen by Bruce. Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, was also enthusiastic about the exhibition, choosing 130 oil paintings on a one-year loan to decorate the new Department of Labor building. In addition, 451 oil paintings and watercolors were allocated to the House of Representatives. Bruce and Watson were amazed at the increasing demand for the works.¹⁷

However, midway through the PWAP exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery, the Federal government decided to dissolve the CWA, and the PWAP itself came to an end in June 1934. With the decision to end the CWA in March 1934, Hopkins, who was also the head of FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Administration), ordered the directors of the district committees to find alternative jobs for the artists. However, almost none of the artists employed by PWAP were engaged in other jobs, and several of the murals were incomplete. FERA, therefore, resolved to employ artists who were deemed to be in need of aid to finish the work and made the district committees the final point of call.¹⁸

Shahn's first piece of work for PWAP was an 8-piece series in small tempera on the theme of prohibition. The ethical issue of man and alcohol dates back to the colonial period in America; however, it developed into a movement for legal regulation midway through the 19th century, and became part of the progressive movement aimed at cleaning up politics and breaking up monopolies at the start of the 20th century. Then in 1919, the prohibition of manufacture, export, and sale of alcohol was brought into effect by the 18th amendment to the US constitution (otherwise known as the Prohibition Law).

There were differing views on the Prohibition Law. On the one hand, prohibition was a democratic movement to protect the traditions of Puritanism and build an ethically pure society. On the other hand, to make a social issue about alcohol consumption, which should be the individual's choice, was seen as no less than fanaticism, which stripped people of their freedom. If anything, Shahn's position was closer to the latter. This can be seen in his depiction of the worn-out expressions of participants in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, whose slogan was 'For God, for your family, for your homeland'.¹⁹

In 1934, Shahn and the artist Lou Block were commissioned by FERA to paint a mural in the corridor of the State penitentiary on Rikers Island. However, despite months of interrogating the inmates and obtaining the consent of the New York Mayor and the Commissioner of Correction, in 1935 the Municipal Art Commission refused three sketches of the mural on the grounds that the prisoners were drawn with extreme humanity, and thus, Shahn's idea did not materialize.²⁰

However, as a result of the CWA's enormous costs of around \$100m, there were strong calls from Republican conservatives against the kind of direct, socialist relief that would damage the incentive to work, and the CWA was dissolved in March 1934. The PWAP, therefore, also came to an end in June 1934; however, it managed to secure \$1,312,177 from the CWA in relief costs, employing around 3,750 artists on a weekly wage of \$26.50 to \$42.50 and completing around 15,600 works in total.²¹ The public were impressed with the quality and regional scale of the work in the PWAP exhibition, which contributed greatly in bringing American art to the people. The Corcoran Gallery exhibition can be seen as its symbolic manifestation. Through his work with PWAP, Shahn himself gained an intense consciousness of the relationship between society and self.²²

2) Treasury Art Project

Section of Painting and Sculpture: Art Relief Project

Keeping in mind the end of PWAP project on April 23, 1934, Bruce consulted with Robert regarding the establishment of a department for art within the Treasury in order to continue with the art project, the cost of which could be supported by PWA funding. Robert then turned to Ickes from the PWA department to request finances of \$100,000 from May 1934 to June 1935, which were granted under the condition that the art project would be placed under the jurisdiction of the PWA.²³

However, the Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. argued that as the art department was within the Treasury and since all public construction is under the Treasury's supervision, the art project should also belong to the Treasury. This issue was resolved in favor of the Treasury in a cabinet meeting on May 18, 1934 and Ickes grudgingly factored in \$5,000 of costs to the Treasury.²⁴ Meanwhile, Bruce lacked vision for the funding, management, and administration of a new art project, and the rift between Ickes and Morgenthau further prevented him from

securing additional capital from the PWA.

Unfortunately, FERA requested the Treasury to return the remaining funds deposited by PWAP. Bruce warned Morgenthau that this would destroy any chance of establishing the art department. In response, Morgenthau stressed that the remaining deposit of around \$16,000 will be maintained to dissolve PWAP and that it was necessary to allocate this deposit to a new art project.²⁵

In any case, Bruce and Morgenthau agreed to end the PWAP relief project, and an executive order by Morgenthau on October 16, 1934 saw the establishment of the Section of Painting and Sculpture in the Treasury, a small-scale version of the initial plan for the art department. The duties of the Section of Painting and Sculpture established by the executive order were to produce high-quality art to decorate public buildings, to hire local artists by public advertisement, and to conduct the project in cooperation with art societies, with the Treasury managing the art project from the viewpoint of jurisdiction and the scale of the budget (1% of the construction cost of Federal buildings).

Bruce became a special adviser to the Treasury's art relief project, and four officials including Rowan and Olin Dows were in charge of running the Section. When viewed in its entirety, however, the Section of Painting and Sculpture was managed by the Procurement Division of the Treasury, the Branch of Supply, and the Public Building Branch, and the organization itself was stuck in Treasury bureaucracy. Accordingly, without the permission of the Procurement Division's director, Christian J. Peoples, it was impossible for the Section of Painting and Sculpture to accomplish the art project.²⁶

Moreover, Morgenthau's executive order did not mention the allocation of 1% of construction expenditure to the art project nor guaranteed the purchase of paintings and sculptures for new buildings, as Bruce had hoped. It was, therefore, necessary for the Section to consult with the relevant bodies to obtain the Procurement Division's permission to guarantee the funds. Nevertheless, the Section was unable to claim funding in cases where the cost of construction exceeded its initial budget, and two years after the art project was launched, more than one in three buildings (83) worth over \$1m in construction costs had insufficient budget to buy and install paintings and sculptures. In addition, the art budget of other buildings was less than 1% and it was difficult for Bruce to achieve his demands either for 1% of the budget or for an allocation of \$1m.

Nevertheless, Bruce channeled his efforts into obtaining funding for the Section of Painting and Sculpture, and he aimed to fight the Treasury's tough stance and bureaucracy to realize the art project. Moreover, since Roosevelt was in the process of creating a relief project for a range of cultural arts including music and theater, Bruce aimed to accomplish the art project by obtaining the cooperation of the New Dealers, namely the President of the United States.²⁷

At the launch of the Section of Painting and Sculpture, Bruce sent a circular to the former district committees of PWAP, reiterating his aim to secure the very best artworks for Federal buildings and raise public awareness of art. Furthermore, the Section was not a relief program to employ artists but a scheme designed to support and improve the quality of the arts, and was, therefore, a project with an aim different than PWAP.²⁸

Bruce was hopeful that the government would preserve the Section permanently, and he published articles in journals such as *Bulletin* and *Art in Federal Buildings*; in addition to dedicating efforts for inaugurating influential exhibitions. For example, Bruce was successful

in holding exhibitions in 1936 at the Whitney Museum and Corcoran Gallery, and he started working towards participation in the New York World's Fair scheduled for 1939. President Roosevelt was particularly impressed with the Corcoran exhibition, and it is said that he was generous in his praise for the democratic way in which the Section appealed to the public in its support for art.²⁹

In order to help the Section become a permanent fixture, Bruce also assisted in the founding of the Smithsonian Gallery of Art. The Smithsonian was established by the donation of paintings and \$50m in capital from former Treasury chief Andrew W. Mellon, and there was an ongoing initiative to establish a storage vault at Washington's National Gallery of Art. Bruce felt strongly that the Smithsonian should become a focal point for American modern art, and he pleaded with Mellon for the gallery to be used by living American artists. Furthermore, Bruce considered the Smithsonian project to be part of his activities with the Section of Painting and Sculpture, which he thought would compromise the government's art support project.³⁰

President Roosevelt approved Bruce's plan, and in March 1937, Senator Thomas Walsh (Massachusetts) and Representative Kent Keller (Illinois) proposed Joint Resolution No. 99, a construction bill for the National Gallery of Art, known as the Smithsonian Gallery. Bruce hoped that approval for the establishment of the National Gallery of Art would help to secure the Section of Painting and Sculpture and fund the art project.

However, Mellon died in March 1938, and his son Paul Mellon's refusal to offer support left construction of the National Gallery of Arts hanging in the balance. Then, in May 1938, Walsh's bill was appointed to the House Joint Resolution 599, and despite gaining the authority to accept large funds from individuals to finance construction, nobody could provide such funds. Bruce sought the cooperation of the Guggenheim Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation in vain.³¹ Nevertheless, Bruce's efforts with these organizations finally bore fruit, and on October 14, 1938, the Section of Painting and Sculpture changed its name to the Section of Fine Arts, and Morgenthau issued an executive order confirming it as a Treasury body in perpetuity.

However, the threat of war in Europe hung over Bruce's art project like a dark cloud, and in his State of the Union address on January 4, 1939, Roosevelt highlighted the dangers to democracy and emphasized that there would be no further national reform. From a domestic viewpoint, Roosevelt's stance revealed the closure of the New Deal, leading to the conservatives' rise to prominence and heavy Democrat losses in the mid-term elections of 1938.³²

The Section of Painting and Sculpture and other Treasury organizations were restructured under the Public Buildings Administration (PBA) in July 1939 and the Section itself was put under the jurisdiction of the Federal Works Agency (FWA). By transferring control to the FWA, the Section lost the perpetuity granted by Morgenthau's executive order. Furthermore, the Section lost Morgenthau's support, and the FWA chief, John M. Carmody, had neither Morgenthau's political influence nor the same interest in art.³³

However, Bruce's enthusiasm to continue the art project did not dwindle, and he proposed the creation of an art department within the FWA with a view to making the Section of Painting and Sculpture a permanent agency. This led to an executive order on April 12, 1940, which established the Section of Fine Arts within the FWA.³⁴ Although the nation was shifting towards a wartime regime, and there may not have been sufficient time to encourage the public's interest in art, the Treasury leaders organized the following exhibitions and activities to

support art: The War Department Mural Competition (October 1939), 48 State Competition and Corcoran Gallery exhibition (November 2 to 25, 1939) and decoration of ships in collaboration with the Maritime Commission, and decoration of the Social Security Building.³⁵

However, the Federal building project was brought to a close by the PBA in 1940, and as fears increased for the future of the Section of Fine Arts and the art project, there was a growing need in society to create a public awareness of art's contribution to the war. Therefore, the Section for Fine Arts won the support of the Office of Civilian Defense and the Office for Emergency Management, and by appealing publicly for paintings of military activities and those of the Red Cross, the Section aimed to preserve the life of the art support project by actively contributing to the war.³⁶ During that period, several artists were questioning themselves about the relationship between art and war. As I shall discuss later, Ben Shahn, who faced the threat to society caused by the Great Depression, became further appalled by the advancing threat of the 'monsters' of war and fascism.

In order to continue with the Section of Fine Arts and the art project, in June 1941, Bruce requested \$50,000 to decorate buildings in the suburbs of Washington; however, the project was turned down by the Senate Budget Committee due to the risk of war damage. The chief of the National Art Committee, Henry V. Poor, came up with a proposal to decorate the new Department for Defense building; however, this was another project which did not materialize.

In the midst of this lingering pessimism, Bruce died in January 1943, and the founder of the art project George Biddle took over. Biddle met with Roosevelt to discuss the artists' recording of the war, and despite launching the Army Art Program in March 1943, the House of Representatives Budget Committee removed the \$125,000 funding necessary for the continuation of the project from their 1944 budget. As a result, it was impossible for the art project to continue, and the Section of Fine Arts was officially dissolved on June 30, 1943.³⁷

Although the wartime regime brought the art support program to an end, the Treasury's Section of Painting and Sculpture and the FWA's Section of Fine Arts represent a nine-year art project during which around \$1,472,000 and \$563,000 was paid for 1,124 paintings and 284 sculptures, respectively, and public buildings were decorated with the work of 1,205 artists from a total of 193 public advertisements. It is generally said that the technical level of the artwork in the support project is high; however, since 1% of the construction budget was dependent on what remained after public utilities, Bruce was constantly anxious about the budget and source of funding. This shows that the efforts of Bruce and the individual support of other New Dealers on behalf of the Section of Fine Arts were considerable.³⁸

Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP)

With the creation of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act (ERAA) in April 1935, Bruce approached President Roosevelt about a project to hire out-of-work artists for decorating new Federal buildings. Then, in May 1935, with the creation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Bruce requested to employ around 500 of the 1,900 artists who were involved in decorating Treasury buildings, revealing that this would be funded by the WPA.³⁹

The Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) began in July 1935, and it was a relatively small scale project. However, while the decoration of Federal buildings was previously restricted to artists recognized by the designers and architects of the buildings, now even unknown artists were given the opportunity to work. Consequently, information regarding work on Federal buildings was advertised in newspapers, which offered a helping hand to unknown artists

suffering in poverty. TRAP was established with a \$530,000 grant to the Treasury from the WPA, whose funding set the following requirements: remuneration by percentage pay ranging from \$69 to \$103 per 96 hours worked monthly, and compulsory employment of 90% of artists on the unemployment relief register.⁴⁰

TRAP resembled the Section of Painting and Sculpture's art support project very closely, in that both were planned as Treasury art projects. Bruce and Watson worked as directors of both with Dow in charge of TRAP. TRAP had three non-artist directors who were responsible for contracts and managing artwork, and it appointed artists who were not on the relief register to run the most important districts. Furthermore, TRAP used the same method as the Section to select artwork, namely, artists would respond anonymously to public advertisements, produce a draft and meet with the architects and those responsible for the Federal building, prior to being sent for approval by Bruce and Watson.⁴¹

Despite this, the criteria of using 90% of artists on the relief register created a significant obstacle for the administration of TRAP. Bruce requested support from Morgenthau, but the WPA's Hopkins was determined to limit TRAP's quota to artists who qualified for relief. As such, even though the quota of artists who did not qualify for relief increased in December 1935, Dow remained dissatisfied with the TRAP artists.⁴²

Moreover, as will be discussed further, when the FAP was created it overlapped with the TRAP and the Section of Painting and Sculpture's art project and this caused confusion and confrontation regarding the running and application of both. For example, the projects competed to hire the best artists, and district WPA staff tightened the way the TRAP was run and put pressure on TRAP artists to obey WPA regulations. Also, there were some WPA staff who attempted to discontinue TRAP activities. Furthermore, FAP staff were upset that the Section of Painting and Sculpture was advertising to FAP artists, which would lead to them abandon the FAP, leaving work unfinished. Also, there was friction between FAP and TRAP, when the reduction in WPA funding forced the FAP to release some of its artists because TRAP was considering a project which required the employment of skillful artists.⁴³

Because such types of problems transpired between the art projects, in the early part of 1936, the Treasury did not apply for relief funding. Congress and the Roosevelt administration believed that the function of ERAA was to create job opportunities, and that they should not have the authority to select artists and artwork. As a result, midway through 1936, TRAP gradually began to be scaled down. The number of artists working for TRAP, which peaked to 356, midway through 1936, decreased to 135 by June 1937, and only 20 artists were registered by June 1938. Finally, by November 1938, none of the artists were involved with TRAP, and the project was brought to a close in June 1939.⁴⁴

By its completion, TRAP had employed some 500 artists at a cost of \$833,784, leaving behind 89 murals, 65 sculptures, and 10,000 paintings and prints. While TRAP was certainly a small-scale project, the fact that it gave the Treasury authority over the use of art in Federal buildings made it significant, because it compensated for the weaknesses of the Section of Painting and Sculpture. Nevertheless, since TRAP was funded by the WPA budget, it was burdened with the shackles of 'relief', and it fell short of its goal of raising the standard of art through employment of the most talented artists. However, this limitation was derived from the concept of the project itself, that is, whether it should be about art or relief, and was an issue which followed all the other art projects.⁴⁵

1. George Biddle, "An Art Renaissance under Federal Patronage," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 85 (June 1934), p. 428; Francis V. O'Conner, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Art Forum* (November 1968), pp. 268-269; Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 5; George Biddle, "Art Under Five Years of Federal Patronage," *American Scholar*, 5 (July 1940), p. 333; Francis V. O'Conner, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Art Forum* (November 1968), p. 268.
2. The Gibson Committee funded around 100 artists with \$20,000 from the relief fund of \$7,500,000 between December 1932 and August 1933. When the Gibson Committee ended, the Temporary Relief Administration led by Hopkins reorganized the Emergency Relief Administration, continuing supporting artists in New York. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Belisario R. Contreras, "The New Deal Treasury Department Art Program and Artists: 1933 to 1943," Ph.D. dissertation (American University, 1967), pp. 23-24. Many ideas on the outline of the art project were taken from Kazushige Hirose, *New Deal Art Project* (1987 Rikkyo University and Graduate University Master's thesis).
3. From 1910, the National American Art Committee has had the authority to advise on general art matters, and in an executive order of July 1921 and Congress legislation in May 1930, it was given the right to regulate art activities affecting Washington's appearance and development. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-108; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Gerald M. Monroe, "The Artists Union of New York," Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 1971), pp. 13-16.
4. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9; Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 17, 20.
5. Joel H. Bernstein, "The Artists and the Government: The P.W.A.P.," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 1 (Fall 1970), pp. 100-115. Once funding for the art project had been achieved by Ickes, Biddle shifted his focus on the production of murals rather than the artist support project, and Bruce became the driving force of the art project. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 9; Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
6. Ref. Kaoru Kato, *Mexican Mural Movement* (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1988); Erika Billeter, ed., *Images of Mexico: The Contribution of Mexico to 20th Century Art* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1987); Francis V. O'Conner, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Art Forum* (November 1968), p. 268; Barbara Rose, *Readings in American Art since 1900* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1967) p. 93 (translated by Sumio Kuwabara, *American Art in the 20th Century*, Bijutsu shuppan, 1970, p. 121)
7. Robert J. Levy, "Art for the Public's Sake, 1920-1943," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1978); Mitchell D. Kahan "Subjective Currents in American Paintings of the 1930s," Ph.D. dissertation (City University of New York, 1983).
8. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 14; Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.
9. The contribution made by the directors of the College Art Association Audrey McMahon and Francis Pollock to New York State artist support is considerable. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11; Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 23-24; Audrey McMahon, "A General View of the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," in Francis V. O'Conner ed., *The New Deal Art Projects: Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), p. 52.
10. The following cities comprised the 16 districts: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Atlanta, New Orleans, St Louis, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, Dallas, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Portland. Forbes Watson, "The Public Works of Art Project," *American Magazine of Art* (January 1934), p. 9; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.
11. William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Art* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1969); Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 16; Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
12. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
13. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 95; Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, p. 232; Cf. George Biddle, "Art Under Five Years of Federal Patronage," *American Scholar* (July 1940).
14. PWAP leader Watson claimed that the organization managed to maintain a neutral position in selecting and hiring artists, and in the quality of work. George Biddle, *ibid.*, p. 430; Forbes Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
15. Because of the huge cost and inefficiency of the CWA, Roosevelt wished to have it dissolved as soon as

- possible. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 122 (Translated by Saburo Kugai, *Roosevelt*, Kinokuniya, 1968, p. 98).
16. The Corcoran Gallery was established in 1869 by William W. Corcoran, and was the largest public gallery in Washington during that period. <http://www.corcoran.org/>; <http://www.corcoran.org/about/entertain.htm>
 17. Olin Dows, "The New Deal's Treasury Art Program: A Memoir," in Francis V. O'Conner, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 31-32. Even Republican senators were apparently surprised at the success of the Corcoran Gallery exhibition, and this made them realize the importance of the government's art project.
 18. Erica Beckh Rubenstein, "Government Art in Roosevelt Era," *Art Journal* (Fall 1960), pp. 3-4.
 19. Alan P. Grimes, *The Puritan Ethnic and Woman Suffrage* (New York: Vikings, 1967); James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement 1900-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).
 20. Tokyo Shinbunsha, ed. *Ben Shahn Exhibition* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shinbunsha, 1970), pp. 173-174; Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, p. 112 (aforementioned translation, p. 88). William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts: The Origins and Administrative History of the Arts Projects of the Works Progress Administration* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969).
 21. Biddle had a great deal of trouble in finding out the government agencies that might provide financial support to PWAP. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85; Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 31-32.
 22. Forbes Watson, "The Public Works of Art Project," *American Magazine of Art* (January 1934), p. 9; Olin Dows, "The New Deal's Treasury Art Program: A Memoir," in Francis V. O'Conner, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18; Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1983).
 23. Bruce requested \$75,000 expenditure from the PWA. Belisario R. Contreras, "The New Deal Treasury Department Art Program and Artists: 1933 to 1943," Ph.D. dissertation, p.90; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
 24. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 90-91; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 36.
 25. Roosevelt was on vacation in Hawaii, so this was not a good time to obtain a presidential resolution. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 93-94; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 37.
 26. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 94-96; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 17.
 27. It is important to stress the significant contribution of Bruce's efforts and support from other New Dealers in establishing the PWA and the Treasury's art project. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 38.
 28. In Morgenthau's executive order, he stressed that one of the duties of the Section of Painting and Sculpture should be to focus on the quality of the artwork. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 32.
 29. There were exhibitions held in both the Whitney Museum (October-November 1936) and Corcoran Gallery (November-December 1936). Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 39; Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-246. <http://www.cocoran.org/>
 30. Although funding for the art project was allocated from the Federal building construction budget, the Section of Painting and Sculpture was a temporary organization. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Gallery_of_Art; <http://www.nga.gov/>
 31. Joint Resolution No. 99 calls for a public construction budget of \$40,000 and a construction budget of \$480,000 from the Treasury. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-257; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-46.
 32. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 262, 266. Raises the issue of funding 1% of the construction cost relying on the Emergency Construction Program.
 33. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 268-269. The Reorganization Act of 1939 was created in April 1939, launching the FWA, the Federal Security Agency, and Federal Loan Agency.
 34. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 274-276.
 35. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 283-289, 291-297. Bruce worried about the public hostility towards an

- art support project led by the Treasury during wartime.
36. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, p. 313; Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Issues of war and art are common concerns that transcend eras and nationality.
 37. Mrs. Bruce endeavored to continue the Section of Fine Arts and the art support project. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 48; Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 319-322, 336-337.
 38. Management costs were \$393,500, and 1,400 contracts were established, totaling \$2,571,000. Olin Dow, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 53.
 39. People's, of the Procurement Division, believed that once granted, he was free to use WPA funding as he pleased. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.
 40. In December 1935, 25% of the non-relief spending was recognized, and the regulation was amended to the use of 75% of artists from the relief register. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156.
 41. Belisario R. Contreras, *ibid.*, pp. 155-157. Dow occasionally clashed with Hopkins, chief of the WPA.
 42. Since Dow and Bruce wanted to carry out the TRAP project using only the most talented artists, they made a deliberate effort to exhaust the budget slowly. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
 43. Cahill, of the FPA, tried to separate the TRAP project's art and relief activities; however, Treasury staff treated TRAP on the same level as the WPA relief activities, regarding the TRAP project as an exhaustion activity. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 40-41, 267-268.
 44. Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, p. 267. In spring 1936, the Artists' Union and other artist organizations joined to form the Artists Coordination Committee, which began negotiations with TRAP. Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 90; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
 45. Hopkins, of the WPA, did not waver in his strong focus on 'relief'. Gerald M. Monroe, *ibid.*, p. 17; Olin Dow, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Francis V. O'Connor, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Art Forum* (November 1968), pp. 43-44.

Chapter 3 Federal Art Project (FAP)

Section 1 Federal Art Project

The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act (ERAA) was created in April 1935, and in May, the WPA was established replacing the short-lived CWA and initiating construction projects for building hospitals, roads, airports, and schools as well as cultural projects for drama, arts, and literature. Total WPA expenditure came to over \$10 billion, and in terms of business stimulus and welfare policy, it played a more important role than the CWA.

Two years following the beginning of the New Deal policy, motions including cultural and art projects were proposed to the President by members of the Roosevelt administration and other New Dealers. For example, Hopkins, the CWA chief, was also appointed to run the WPA, and in December 1934, he made a proposal for a new regeneration and relief program in which artists could participate. Following the dissolution of the PWAP in June 1934, Bruce made a proposal for a painting project to record public works, and as a result Hopkins resolved to put into place new cultural policies following legislation by Congress.¹

After the discontinuation of the CWA and PWAP, Roosevelt himself was planning a comprehensive culture policy that included music and drama, and the culture and art project was ready to begin after the establishment of new legislation on relief and regeneration. Consequently, in April 1935, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was inaugurated by Congress, and in May, Roosevelt issued executive order 7034, making the WPA responsible for the culture and art project.²

Since the WPA was to undertake the cultural and art activities, Hopkins was required to produce a draft plan. Audrey McMahon, director of the College Art Association who had backed the art support project in New York, also made a significant contribution for establishing the WPA.³

In terms of organization, WPA projects were run at district and federal level. Those responsible for district projects petitioned for sponsors for local activities and undertook part of the WPA tasks, while federal projects did not involve sponsors and conducted projects led by WPA officials in Washington. The FAP was one of these projects, and while local WPA officials were responsible for practical work such as providing wages, administration, and relief certificates, activities involving artists and their work were supervised by specialists in Washington.⁴

August 1935 saw the beginning of the WPA's largest project, the FAP, which had inherited the ideals of the PWAP. The WPA's culture section was divided into theater, painting, literature, music, and historical records, while the main project involved painting (Federal One). The Federal Music Project, Federal Theater Project, and Federal Writers Project also came into effect.

There was a wide range of artists in the FAP, from painters and sculptors to graphic artists, who were hired after careful examination and were paid on the condition of regular work submission. The WPA provided the artists with canvas, paint, brushes, and other materials, and the artists' role was to depict people's lives in their paintings and produce murals for public buildings. Thus, the FAP began as a public project under the jurisdiction of the WPA and its aim was to hire and train artists, promulgate art outside the major cities, and record and preserve cultural heritage. The easel division and print division were also created.⁵

WPA chief Hopkins asked McMahon to lead the FAP; however, her husband refused, and instead he chose Holger Cahill, who was well connected in the art world.⁶ Cahill proposed the merging of art and life as the FAP's founding principle, and his idea was to bring art into everyday life by having a wide range of FAP artists act as mediators, rather than relying on a small minority of highly-talented artists. In short, the aim of the FAP was to improve the quality of people's lives by means of the art project, and this conformed to the WPA's principle of unemployment relief and sheltered work programs.⁷

In August 1935, Cahill began to organize the structure of the FAP. He appointed Thomas C. Parker of Richmond art association, Virginia, as Vice Director, and summoned Mildred Holzhauer to Washington, who recommended to McMahon that Cahill should be the supervisor of FAP for the task of selecting supervisors for each state. Thus, Cahill selected nine directors to act as field supervisors, whose function was to spread awareness about the FAP's objectives.

For Hopkins, Cahill arranged a meeting of WPA officials in Washington with the aim of promoting the FAP's projects and established measures regarding the way the WPA would manage affairs. Thus, the FAP's projects were implemented, and by December 1937, 44.5% of all FAP artists were employed in New York, where it is believed that over 40% of US artists lived.⁸

However, there was confusion over the lack of clarity regarding the authority of the WPA and FAP, and some FAP district directors had greater influence than the national director because of their relations with state WPA officials. For example, although Cahill was responsible for the approval of state FAP officials from state WPA officials, some local directors interfered

with decisions made in Washington. Furthermore, in some cases, local celebrities were appointed as the district directors and since their lack of management ability led to problems, Cahill was forced to dismiss some of the directors to restore the FAP's image.⁹

However, as soon as the FAP began to gather speed, Jacob Baker of the WPA Professional and Service Projects Division proposed that all the jurisdictions of the art and culture projects should be transferred to the state WPA. The reason for this was the confusion and annoyance felt by state WPA officials in sharing power with the FAP officials; however, since Cahill himself was focused on raising the quality of the artwork, he felt that the project should stay under federal jurisdiction. As a result of Cahill's consultation with the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, it was decided that the practical aspects of the art and culture project should remain under federal control.¹⁰

However, there was no resolution of the conflict between state WPA managers and FAP technical directors, and it was difficult to make a clear distinction between the jurisdiction and duties of Washington, whose focus was on the quality of the art and culture projects, and the individual states, which managed the projects. Consequently, even if Cahill gave the state directors the power to choose their artists, the state was unable to make a fair assessment of the level at which the relief was applicable nor of the artists' skill, and the FAP faced problems similar to the PWAP, namely whether to prioritize the need for relief or the quality of the artwork.¹¹

In addition, the FAP was in an extremely unstable position with regard to its budget. The FAP's budget allocation was determined as part of a general framework discussed by Hopkins and Roosevelt and approved by Congress. When there was an upturn in the economy, the WPA tightened the employment quota, and when the business situation worsened, the number of quotas was tightened.¹²

The White House and Congress made requests to the state WPA officials for the states to bear the FAP costs, and Roosevelt himself hoped that they would shoulder as much as 40% of the expense. However, the high cost of labor was significant, and the proportion of FAP costs borne by the states did not exceed 10-23%. Consequently, in July 1937, the federal government announced a tightening of the federal budget for states bearing less than 20% of FAP costs, and at the end of the year the decision was made to reduce FAP labor costs to \$1,000 per worker per year.¹³

The so-called 'Roosevelt Recession' of 1937 was beginning, Republican conservatives were coming into prominence and criticism of New Deal policies started to grow.¹⁴ As a result, criticism of the WPA grew stronger, and in December 1938, when WPA activities that were outside the budget were revealed, Hopkins was forced to resign from his post as WPA chief. However, even by 1939, criticism of the WPA's culture policies had not died completely, the FAP employment term was limited to 18 months and the total budget was decreased by 25%. The 1940 budget allowed for further strengthening of the military and cut down of the WPA's projects and budget. Consequently, the FAP became the WPA Art Program, while Cahill remained as the Washington director.¹⁵

However, as the nation moved towards a wartime regime, in March 1942, all the WPA art projects were transferred to the Graphics Section of the War Services Division, and in December of the same year, President Roosevelt finally issued an executive order announcing the cancellation of WPA projects. The WPA was dissolved on June 30, 1943 and the FAP also came to an end.¹⁶

Section 2 Significance of the FAP and Ben Shahn

Similar to other art projects, the FAP too faced many difficulties, which arose from the question of whether the project itself was directed at unemployment relief or progress of art. Because the FAP was an unemployment relief project, according to policy and the administrative process, it was expected to naturally conclude as unemployment reduced. Consequently, as wartime approached, the art project concluded because Congress refused to grant a permanent status to the art project and rejected the creation of the Federal Art Act and the Bureau of Fine Arts.¹⁷

However, the FAP compensated for a deficiency of the PWAP and employed artists on the basis of their performance in an examination. Also, a payment structure was imposed on the basis of the artist providing regular work. For example, the Easel Division selected artists by conducting an examination that required the artists to produce a piece of work every 4–8 weeks for a standard weekly wage of \$23. Furthermore, the FAP were flexible with regard to the form and content of the artwork, thus enabling the selected artists to continue their work freely.¹⁸ During the FAP's golden age, it employed over 5,000 artists including Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, Willem De Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Charles Alston, and Aaron Bohrod.

The government's expenditure on the FAP was approximately \$70 m that amounted to 4,000 murals; 17,744 sculptures; 108,099 paintings; and 11,285 prints. Also, exhibitions and classes that taught painting, sculpture, dyeing, and modeling were held in schools, settlements, and farming communities, and 107 new community art centers were concentrated in the southwestern states. Between 1935 and 1941, communities spent over \$1 m on these centers, over 80 m people participated in activities, and 450 touring exhibitions were held. Several lectures on art were also held, and in New York within the first six months from January 1937, 800 lecturers held 3,295 classes. The FAP touring exhibitions and lectures gave people from different cities their first opportunity to view original works of art, thus making them aware of art for the first time.¹⁹

The FAP's touring exhibitions and lectures influenced activity in these communities, and contributed to their development. As a result, the 4,000 plus public building murals in these districts became a visual symbol for the New Deal and for the American society.²⁰

The FAP chief, Cahill, was aware of the importance of daily life and community, and he felt that the purpose of the FAP was to unite art itself with the practical art of everyday life. Keeping this idea in mind, Cahill assembled some 500 artists to compile the Index of American Design, which records everyday objects and the cultural heritage of the nation. As a product of the WPA culture department in the midst of this social anxiety, the Index is a symbol that reveals the significance of the FAP.²¹

By the latter half of the 1920s, private commercial galleries were well established. As the depression became more severe, the Downtown Gallery's Halpert requested for support from Cahill for Gorky and Shahn. Halpert was also in charge of the mural planned for the Radio City Music Hall in the Rockefeller Center in 1932 and the New York Art Exhibition in 1934, and can be seen to have had a huge influence on the New Deal art project. The actions of specialists who focused on the relationship between art and the community were significant in the creation of the FAP.²²

In contrast to the earlier PWAP, which discouraged caricature in artwork and required depictions of the American scene, the FAP allowed a freer approach and aimed for a wide range of styles. This aspect complemented the values of Ben Shahn, whose awareness to issues

in society progressed as a result of his experience of the Great Depression and the New Deal policies.²³

Meanwhile, as described by his wife Bernarda, Shahn's camera helped him win the trust of government agencies and work on many FAP projects. As the severe economic decline began in 1933, Shahn began to take photographs at the age of 35 and he was largely influenced by the photographer Walker Evans, with whom he shared a studio in the Greenwich Village. Evans had studied avant-garde photography in Paris, and he took vivid pictures that recorded the depression in the United States. Evans' photographs of the Deep South made Shahn feel that people's lives and the breath of their land were transmitted directly to him, and this particularly gave him a strong sense of awareness that an essential artistic motif existed within the state of reality captured in a photographic instant. As a result of this, Shahn had his elder brother buy him a camera.²⁴

The first compact Leica camera was produced in Germany in 1925, leading to the expansion of the field of photography, and the publication of photography magazines *Life* and *Look* in the USA around 1934. For Shahn, the camera was a powerful weapon to closely monitor the American society, which seemed on the verge of being crushed, in the somber fate of the depression. In cities, one in four people lost their job; in agricultural areas, many people had their land and home repossessed because of burgeoning debt; and hundreds of starving people lined up outside soup kitchens. By photographing these kinds of scenes, Shahn gained the ability to capture his compositions instantly and to give his images an objective, realistic angle. Evidently, Shahn "penetrated real society through photography" and "returned to his artistic roots by giving himself a new voice through photographs."²⁵

1. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 76. Hopkins was the chief of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), but because relief operations were paid for by unemployment relief funding and work offered as compensation was of a low standard, he was not fond of FERA itself.
2. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 76; Belisario R. Contreras, *op. cit.*, p. 155. Hopkins wanted to plan the culture and art project with Bruce.
3. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 77; Audrey McMahon, "A General View of the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," in Francis V. O'connor, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 54.
4. Biddle describes that WPA believed that it was the 15th century that made Michelangelo, and not Michelangelo who made the 15th century. George Biddle, "Art Under Five Years of Federal Patronage," *American Scholar* (July 1940), pp. 333-334.
5. The WPA Art Program was also called Federal Project Number One. Initially, the four sections of theater, painting, literature, and music were put into the WPA Professional and Service Projects Division led by Jacob Baker. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
6. Cahill himself took the position of the FAP director without having much interest in the role. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 78; Audrey McMahon, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
7. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 80; Gerald M. Monroe, *ibid.*, p. 19. Hopkins emphasized to the WPA staff that unemployment relief was nothing to be ashamed of.
8. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 81, 93. The Artists' Union had a significant influence in hiring unemployed artists for the art project.
9. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 80-82. These kinds of problems originate in both the WPA and the FAP.
10. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 82. Cahill was not against transferring authority to the states; however, he did feel that it would take time to raise the quality of the art and culture project in each state.
11. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 86-87. "Foreigners" such as Kuniyoshi did not qualify to participate in the WPA art project.

12. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 84; Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Cahill was concerned that WPA officials might exclude the FAP, and an increase in its budget allocation was the last thing on his mind.
13. However, because this resolution excluded a large number of highly paid artists, in June 1938, Roosevelt approved the labor cost of \$1,200. Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
14. Nobuyuki Kawauchi, *New Deal: America during the Great Depression* (Tokyo: Gakujutsu shuppan, 2005) chapter 9.
15. The Democratic conservative Clifton Woodrum (Virginia) was head of the House of Representatives budget committee, and he worked with the Republican John Taber (New York) to produce the draft budget of 1940. The approval of this draft by Congress resulted in a large-scale reduction of the WPA projects and budget. Richard D. McKinzie, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 163; Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 223-224. Roosevelt signed the draft personally to prevent the total dissolution of the WPA.
16. Gerald M. Monroe, *ibid.*, p. 238; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, p. 169. Sarah Hutchinson, "New Deal Art," translated by Kiyomi Morimoto, *TRENDS* (October 1980), p. 22.
17. The Federal Art Act was created in January 1935 at the request of Artist's Union leaders. Lincoln Rothschild, "Artists' Organizations of the Depression Decade," in Francis V. O'Conner, ed., *The New Deal Art Projects* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), p. 201; Richard D. McKinzie, *ibid.*, pp. 163, 185; Gerald M. Monroe, *ibid.*, p. 198. Ref. following article by O'Connor. Francis V. O'Conner, ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930's by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic, 1973); *Federal Art Patronage, 1933-43* (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland Press, 1966); *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971).
18. Erica B. Rubenstein, "Government Art in the Roosevelt Era," *Art Journal* (Fall 1960), pp. 3-4.
19. Lewis Mumford, "The Government Should Support Art," in Howard Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), p. 169; Nobuyuki Kawauchi, "New Deal Art Policy and American Art," *Toho Gakuen Bulletin*, No.8 (1982).
20. Frances Pohl, "Constructing History: A Mural by Ben Shahn," *Arts Magazine*, 62 (September 1987), pp. 36-40; Karal A. Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982); Aline B. Louchheim, "Shahn Feels Deeply and Sees Clearly," *Art News*, 43 (1944).
21. <http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/iad.htm> The Collection of National Gallery of Art. Barbara Rose makes a far lower estimate of the number of artists, who participated in the FAP, and the work they produced. Barbara Rose, *op. cit.*, p.104 (aforementioned translation, p. 133).
22. Diane Tepfeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-232; Gerald M. Monroe, "The '30s: Art, Ideology and the WPA," *Art in America*, 63 (November/December 1975), pp. 64-67; Helen A. Harrison, "American Art and the New Deal," *Journal of American Studies*, 6 (December 1972), pp. 289-296.
23. Donald Key, "Milwaukee's Art of the Depression Era," *Historical Messenger of the Milwaukee County Historical Society*, 31 (Summer 1975), pp. 38-49; Hildreth York, "The New Deal Art Projects in New Jersey," *New Jersey History*, 98 (Fall-Winter 1980), pp. 132-174; Pauline A. Stein, "A Vision of El Dorado: The Southern California New Deal Art Programs," Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 1984).
24. Tateo Shimizu, "Journey through the Masterpieces of the World: Ben Shahn," *Asahi Shimbun* (December 22, 1985) James C. Curtis and Sheila Grannon, "Let Us Now Appraise Famous Photographs: Walker Evans and Documentary Photography," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15 (Spring 1980), pp. 1-23; Jerry L. Thompson, ed., *Walker Evans at Work* (New York: Thomas and Hudson, 1983).
25. When Shahn took snapshots he used a right-angle finder attachment for the camera. Davis Pratt, ed., *The Photographic Eye of Ben Shahn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Kenneth Prescott, *The Complete Graphic Works of Ben Shahn* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1973); Margaret R. Weiss, *Ben Shahn, Photographer: An Album from the Thirties* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973).

Chapter 4 Federal Art Project (FAP) and Ben Shahn

Section 1 Journey to the Great Depression

From 1935 to 1938, Shahn was requested by the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration to take part in a job related to the FAP branch of the WPA. This involved the creation of a poster to spread awareness of the New Deal policies, and a collection of photos centered on America's agricultural communities to document the dangers faced by the country. Owing to the photography skills that Shahn learned from his friend Evans, he was hired by the WPA as a 'Specialist artist' in the technical skills group. The project was headed by the economics scholar, Roy E. Stryker, and aside from Shahn, others such as Dorothea Lange participated. In this way, Shahn came to be involved in an FAP project, and together with his wife Bernarda, he traveled to 55 cities in the south and midwest taking photographs to document people's lives through the eyes of an artist.¹

With Bernarda at the wheel and his beloved Leica with its right-angle finder attached in hand, Shahn took a succession of photographs of farmers, laborers, and unemployed people. They made three such journeys together, taking several pictures of people's lives as well as the boundless American scenery, which they grew to love. They collected around 6,000 such pictures, and it is said to have influenced his life and his perception of society not to mention his own works as well.

In October 1935, Shahn visited the mining areas of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and in November 1936, together with Evans he made a documentary film in Branchville and Greenbelt, Maryland, about New Deal settlement communities. In summer 1937, he also visited settlement communities in Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia, and New Jersey.

Shahn also became interested in the strike at an ironworks in Warren, Ohio, and in summer 1937, he conducted research about the workers' demands. Towards the end of this project in 1938, Shahn was busy conducting research in Ohio during the July-August harvest period, and while staying with Bernarda in Washington, he took some 3,000 photographs of the cities and rural areas around Columbus.²

This journey had a great influence on Shahn, as can be seen from the origin of the 'social-realism' in his art. Works such as *Unemployed* (1938), *WPA Sunday* (1939), *Myself among the churchgoers* (1939), and *Willis Avenue Bridge* (1940) originate from Shahn's experience of 'society' and 'man' during these journeys.³

Shahn was particularly shocked at seeing the terrible situation of mining and cotton production caused by the depression and he was moved to take photographs, similar to the artists who resonated with the times. During these journeys, Shahn learned about people's individual personalities and the different ways people lead their lives. Thus, he came to believe: "We should approach the human being more closely. Then, we should tell the story of each individual, not their statistics."⁴

When he looks back at this period, Shahn recalls that during these photography trips, some of his theories evaporated and his style changed from social realism to personal realism.⁵ Hence, we can conclude that he developed into a social artist who surveyed the reality of people and society in the United States and gained deep social convictions. In this sense, it can be seen that, Shahn's views became more populist and the motifs of his work became a perspective on reality when compared to his pieces on bribery scandals and frame-ups in the early 1930s.

In December 1936, an exhibition opened in one of the FAP galleries in New York, displaying posters, photographs, paintings, and sculptures on the subject of the New Deal policies. Shahn entered his work, along with up-coming artists such as Evans, Arnold Rothstein, Dorothea Lange, T. Jung, Carl Mydans, E. Johnson, and P. Carter. This exhibition received great acclaim, and it raised expectations for the latter part of the New Deal for the Roosevelt administration, who were planning social welfare and economic reform over a wider scale.⁶

Section 2 Development into a social artist

By using his experience from journeys during the Great Depression, Shahn set to work with a great appetite. Consequently, we can divide his work into two fields. First, the work he produced according to the FAP's aim to depict scenes of America and the lives of its citizens, and second, the murals on public buildings, which were commissioned directly by the federal government.

Having seen floods of unemployed people in the cities, Shahn began to realize that there was no such thing as long-lasting economic wealth, and in works such as *Unemployed* (1938) and *Voice of People* (1939), he revealed the struggling forms of people in the shadow of a self-satisfied, material society. These works have the use of dark colors and a simple composition in common, and Shahn's role as a cool-headed documentarist and realist becomes clear. However, Shahn's cold view of city life became warm and affectionate when applied to society in the south and the farming communities. This can be seen in works such as *Sunday Painting* (1938) and *Carnival* (1939).⁷

During this period of social anxiety, it was impossible for Shahn to ignore problems of racial inequality. For example, one of Shahn's photographs is of four white people playing music outdoors. He painted two of these people onto canvas, and painted a black man playing the guitar and harmonica, calling this painting *Four Piece Orchestra* (1944). In this way, Shahn was able to take inspiration from his pictures and resurrect sections of a photograph as a painting with original composition and colors. This type of scene would have been extremely difficult to find in the south, where racial discrimination was at its most severe. However, Shahn's deliberate intention to make an issue out of racial discrimination can clearly be seen in the process of creating one work from the motif of another.⁸

Shahn, who saw material dreams crushed by the depression, began to yearn for good old America similar to the FAP. The immigrants and pioneers portrayed in works such as *Immigrant Family* (1939) are given an expression of loneliness by Shahn, revealing his nostalgia about the foundation of American society.

However, Shahn stayed firm in his approach to the present and he produced a number of murals for public buildings.

First, between 1936 and 1938, he completed a large fresco for the Center of Federal Housing Development at Jersey Homesteads (later renamed Roosevelt), New Jersey. The influence of Rivera is evident in this work, and it is said that the Rikers Island penitentiary mural, which did not materialize, proved very useful. On the left-hand panel, Jewish immigrants pursued by Nazis pass by the coffins of Sacco and Vanzetti and they are led off the ship by Einstein.

This section contrasts the manual and machine industry, unemployed people and laborers, and the materialistic society of the past with the present. The center panel depicts the formation of trade unions, while the right-hand panel shows workers of the future. In this fresco, Shahn

highlights the vibrant energy of people, and the work is a dynamic display of people and their stories, by which Shahn wished to praise the New Deal.

The Jersey Homesteads was a FSA housing development project. It became home to 200 immigrant families, which were mainly Jewish (around 800 people), and was equipped with a textile factory and a collective farm to allow the community to become self-sufficient. The federal government first began the FERA, and organizations such as the RA and FSA helped to develop these communities, and the development of the Jersey Homesteads was planned mainly for Jewish immigrants.⁹ After completing the mural at the Center of Federal Housing Development, Shahn decided to move into the Jersey Homesteads, and after living for a short time in New York's upper east side, he moved to the Homesteads with Bernarda and their two children.¹⁰

Then, from 1938-39, at the request of the Section of Fine Arts, Public Buildings Administration, Shahn produced 13 large frescos and panels for the main lobby of the Bronx Central Annex Post Office in New York. By including Walt Whitman in these works, Shahn was highlighting the importance to workers of 'man' and 'democracy'. While the Center of Federal Housing Development murals were aimed at smaller communities, this piece of work was produced on behalf of countless workers in the cities, and Shahn approached the wide-ranging theme of 'man' and his great energy by using bold compositions and colors.

By using contrasting themes such as agriculture and manufacturing, country and city, south and north, Shahn created symbolic images of American society, and produced work that had much more warmth and depth than that of the Center of Federal Housing Development murals. The soft expression and great depth of his photographs of black people picking cotton was not the product of European aesthetics, but Shahn's own, original form of frank, bold expressiveness.¹¹

As part of the request from Section of Fine Arts, Public Buildings Administration, Shahn worked from 1940-1941 on a mural whose themes were: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom to vote. This 'Four Freedoms' mural was created for the Woodhaven Branch Post Office in Queens, New York, but since the threat of war was inevitable and the country was moving towards a wartime regime, the mural was made to incorporate the 'Four Freedoms' highlighted by President Roosevelt in his State of the Union address of January 1941.¹² In addition, between 1940 and 1942, Shahn produced huge frescos such as *Farmer* (1941) and *Basketball Players* (1942) for Washington's Social Security Building.¹³

Regardless of the reappearance of fears in society due to the 1937 recession and the approach of wartime in the late 1930s, these murals continued to support the New Deal and praise the citizens of the United States.¹⁴

Although the mural movement represented by Shahn was short lived, in America, it created a feeling reminiscent of a social art renaissance. Realistic murals of city and agricultural workers and people's daily lives were produced to reinvigorate those afflicted by the depression, and the 'forgotten people', with an appetite for work and a sense of society. Several artists who took part in the FAP gained a sense of the murals' relationship with society, and they learned professionalism and social consciousness that had been lacking until that point. For example, a post office or school would request a painting of a scene or event particular to their region, and since the artist would work on the project in consultation with local people, residents were enthusiastic in ensuring the progress of the mural. As a result, for the artist, mural painting

became a community activity directly involved with local people and the work itself became a symbol of the times.¹⁵

As part of the New Deal that endeavored to bring citizens together, the artists who participated in the FAP mural project envisioned the achievement through art of a renaissance-like union of the nation and its people. As can be seen in the formation of the Artists' Union (1936) and Artists Congress (1937), the heightened feeling of solidarity and sense of society among the artists themselves is an important factor that must not be overlooked. Along with other members of the Artists Congress, Peter Blume, Paul Strand, Margaret Bourke White, Moses Soyer, and William Gropper, Shahn had several lively debates about the significance of FAP projects and its artists' approach to society.¹⁶

1. The photography project continued from the RA and FSA to the Office of War Information. Charles Hagen, ed., *American Photographers of the Depression: Farm Security Administration Photographs 1935-1942* (New York: Pantheon books, 1985). Also, the aim of the photography project gradually shifted to that of recording rural America. Rei Masuda "Ben Shahn's photography: Artist at the Origin of Image," *Grafica* vol. 2 (2006).
2. The cities visited by Shahn for his research have been recorded by Harvard University. <http://www.artmuseums.harvard.edu/home/index.html>
3. Norihisa Matsumoto, *op. cit.*, p. 175. Harvard University Art Museum, Gift of Bernarda Bryson Shahn. These vast collection of photographs are preserved in Harvard University's Fogg Museum. Ben Shahn at Harvard (<http://www.artmuseums.harvard.edu/Shahn>)
4. The time had come for Shahn to announce his sudden lack of interest in photography. Over 160,000 prints from the FSA photography project are kept in the United States Library of Congress. *America from the Great Depression to World War II, Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945* (Prints and Photpgraphs Division, Library of Congress)
4. Bernarda B. Shahn, *Ben Shahn* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1964) (Edited by Sumio Kuwabara Ben Shahn Collection, Libro Port, 1981). Tateo Shimizu, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-19. Thomas H. Garver, ed., *Just Before the War: Urban America as Seen by Photographers of the Farm Security Administration* (Los Angeles: Rapid Lithograph, 1968); John J. Culley and Peter L. Peterson, "Hard Times on the High Plains: FSA Photography during the 1930s," *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review*, 52 (1979), pp. 15-37.
5. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, pp. 40-41 (aforementioned translation, p. 57-58). Since Shahn adds "a sort of" to recollections of his shift towards 'individual realism', signs of change can be said to have first appeared in the latter half of the 1930s.
6. Jerald C. Maddox, ed., *Walker Evans, Photographers for the Farm Security Administration, 1935-1938* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), pp. 10-11; Robert Harling, "Ben Shahn in Roosevelt," *Art*, 1 (1955), p. 11; Julie M. Boddy, "The Farm Security Administration Photographs of Marion Post Wolcott: A Cultural History," Ph.D. dissertation (State University of New York, 1982).
7. Tateo Shimizu, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Ben Shahn: Paintings and Graphics, July 30-September 10, 1967; Santa Fe East Gallery, Ben Shahn: Voices and Visions, September 18-October 31, 1981; Ben Shahn, *Paragraphs on Art* (New York: Spiral Press, 1952).
8. Tateo Shimizu, *ibid.*, pp. 33-38. Bernarda B. Shahn, "The Drawings of Ben Shahn," *Image*, 2 (Autumn 1949), pp. 31-50; Ben Shahn, "Just What Is Realism?" *Art Education*, 3 (December 1950), pp. 2-4; Alfred Werner, "Ben Shahn: The Artist as Social Critics," *American Artist*, 39 (December 1975), pp. 48-53.
9. *Time* (June 29, 1936); Cf. Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976).
10. For Shahn, the Jersey Homestead would be home for the rest of his life. Norihisa Matsumoto, *op. cit.*, p. 173-174.

11. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, pp. 29-31 (aforementioned translation, p. 37-41). Yoshiaki Tono, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-34. Frances K. Pohl, "Constructing History: A Mural by Ben Shahn," *Arts Magazine*, 62 (September 1987), pp. 36-40; Karal A. Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982); Aline B. Louchheim, "Shahn Feels Deeply and Sees Clearly," *Art News*, 43 (1944).
12. It is thought that this has some relationship with Roosevelt's October 1937 'Quarantine Speech.' Nobuyuki Kawauchi, *op. cit.*, chapter 9.
13. The Social Security Building is now known as the Wilbur J. Cohen Building. In order to praise the achievements of the Wisconsin Progressive Party, in 1937 Shahn completed the *Great State of Wisconsin* mural. Norihisa Matsumoto, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
14. Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930's with Examples from New York City and State* (New York: Gallery Association of New York State, 1977); Michele Vishny, "Ben Shahn, Philip Guston, and Seymour Fogel for the Social Security Building, Washington, D.C.," *Art Magazine*, 61 (March 1987), pp. 40-43.
15. Ralph Pearson, "A Modern Viewpoint: Ben Shahn at the Modern," *Art Digest*, 22 (December 1, 1947), p. 36; Charles W. Boyens, "The WPA Mural Projects: The Effects of Constraints on Artistic Freedom," Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University Teachers College, 1984); Carolyn C. Robbins, "Ben Shahn's Mine Building: A Symbol of Disaster," *Journal of Art History*, 12 (Austin: Arizona State University, 1956), pp. 25-34.
16. Gerald M. Monroe, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-31; Robert C. Vitz, "Clubs, Congress, and Unions: American Artists Confront the Thirties," *New York History*, 54 (October 1973), pp. 425-447.

Conclusion

Towards the end of the 1940s, when the focus of world art began to shift from Montparnasse to Manhattan, Abstract Expressionists were the overwhelming majority of American artists whose influence spread throughout the world. However, Shahn was different because he remained in the concrete world of man's image and his relationship with society. Thus, several critics refer to Shahn's style as 'social realism.'

Shahn believed that in abstraction, the 'concept' stands alone and the meaning of the motif is lost. If the motif has no meaning, it becomes impossible to accurately depict 'man' and his 'story,' and Shahn felt that this resulted in work lacking any content. From this perspective, abstract artists painted 'only a small part', whereas Shahn wished to create 'large paintings' which included 'all parts'.

Upon returning to the United States from Paris, Shahn began work on a range of socially-themed pieces, and took part in several mural projects on behalf of the New Deal art administration, and it was then that he 'became inspired' by and turned his focus toward the American idea of 'some things that are bigger than oneself,' which was central to the New Deal. For Shahn, these 'bigger things' consistently remained 'outside,' like the troubles of 'society,' and in this sense, Shahn's realism was 'social'. As a result of this approach, in his depictions of 'man,' Shahn was determined to use simplification and caricature methods.

During his 'Great Depression journey,' Shahn observed immigrants, the unemployed, and the blacks who lived their lives with an eagerness that belied the threatening conditions surrounding them. Despite of the depression, each of them had their own 'stories.' Because of this, during the latter half of his journey, Shahn picked up his paintbrush and turned once

more to his canvas. He produced a series of paintings entitled *Sunday Picture*, in which he included the distinctive appearance of several of the people he met during his journey. In this way, by retracing Shahn's steps, it can be seen that the Great Depression and New Deal, which created America's representative 'social realists' and gave rise to a strong sense of society, were at the origin of Shahn's ability to take a multifaceted view of 'man'.

Throughout the impact of the Great Depression in America, Shahn's participation in the New Deal art project broadened his view of society. He was an artist who continually demanded that art should play a role in people's lives. In other words, while battling against the contradictions of his time under the New Deal, he was a symbolic artist who with a great deal of affection attempted to broach the conditions of the 'man' struggling to breathe at the foot of American society.

Ben Shahn was not an artist who performed 'art for art's sake' but one who tried to convey a 'social message' through his work. The reasons for this are his wish to prove his identity through his art activities and his desire to make a clear link between 'man' and 'society,' and question 'man's universality' in his work.