October 1, 2015

EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

Title: ART FOR THE PEOPLE: CARL W. PETERS AND THE ROCHESTER WPA MURALS


Description: Between 1935 and 1943, the federal government funded the arts through the Works Progress Administration. Rochester’s program, termed “the most interesting and effective outside of New York City,” was hosted by the Memorial Art Gallery and administered by its director, Gertrude Herdle Moore. This exhibition highlights a group of rarely-seen studies and sketches by Rochester artist Carl W. Peters for 13 extant WPA murals, most of which were done for the Rochester City School District. Also on view are additional works by Peters and Rochester WPA posters on loan from the Library of Congress.

Programs & events: MAG will host a members’ opening party (October 17), an all-day symposium (October 18), two film screenings (October 18 and November 15); an educators’ inservice (October 21), and a presentation on Depression-era songs by Michael Lasser (November 1). For detailed information see attached release.

Credit line: Art for the People was organized by the Memorial Art Gallery. It is sponsored by the Gallery Council of the Memorial Art Gallery, with additional support from the Herdle-Moore Fund, the Robert L. and Mary L. Sproull Fund, the University of Rochester School of Arts and Sciences, Paul Marc & Pamela Miller Ness, Marguerite & James Quinn, and the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation. Underwriting is also provided by New York State Council on the Arts and administered by Museum Association of New York. The October 18 symposium is sponsored by the Humanities Project, University of Rochester School of Arts & Sciences.

Hours: Wednesday–Sunday 11 am to 5 pm and until 9 pm on Thursdays; closing at 3 pm December 24 and 31. Closed Mondays, Tuesdays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Year’s Day.

Admission: $14; senior citizens, $10; college students with ID and children 6–18, $5. Always free to members, UR students, and children 5 and under. Half-price general admission Thursdays from 5–9 pm is made possible in part by Monroe County.

MAG on the web: mag.rochester.edu

Press contacts: Meg Colombo (585) 276-8934 / mcolombo@mag.rochester.edu
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Bottom: the mural, at Madison High School (relocated to Joseph C. Wilson Foundation Academy).
October 1, 2015

MAG EXHIBITION TELLS STORY OF ROCHESTER'S HIDDEN TREASURES
Carl W. Peters Painted Murals During the Great Depression

ROCHESTER, NY — In the 1930s and early 1940s, Carl W. Peters—a Rochester artist known primarily as a landscape painter—created 14 monumental murals for local landmarks. The murals were commissioned by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal to lift the country out of the Great Depression. Today, all but one of these “hidden treasures” survive in good condition, mostly in buildings of the Rochester City School District.

A major exhibition organized by the Memorial Art Gallery explores the Rochester murals through the artist’s rarely-seen original studies and sketches. Art for the People: Carl W. Peters and the Rochester WPA Murals opens October 18 at MAG and remains on view through January 3, 2016. Also on view are other works by Peters, archival materials, and Rochester WPA posters on loan from the Library of Congress.

Art for the People is sponsored by the Gallery Council of the Memorial Art Gallery, with additional support from the Herdle-Moore Fund, the Robert L. and Mary L. Sproull Fund, the University of Rochester School of Arts and Sciences, Paul Marc & Pamela Miller Ness, Marguerite & James Quinn, and the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation. Underwriting is also provided by New York State Council on the Arts and administered by Museum Association of New York. The October 18 symposium is sponsored by the Humanities Project, University of Rochester School of Arts & Sciences.

Carl W. Peters, the Herdle Sisters and the WPA

The Rochester murals were the work of a gifted artist with deep ties to the Memorial Art Gallery.

Carl W. Peters (1897–1980) was born to a farming family in Fairport, NY and showed artistic promise from an early age. As a teenager he studied illustration at the Mechanics Institute (now RIT) while working for decorative scenic painters in the city. During World War I, he painted camouflage on tankers, resuming his studies after the war at the Art Students League in New York and at its summer school in Woodstock.

Peters’s skill and reputation as a painter of landscapes increased through the 1920s. He was soon declared the “new discovery among the painters of Rochester,” and began winning national awards.

Then came the Great Depression—a decade in which even the most talented artists found themselves struggling to make a living. Enter the Works Progress Administration, which from 1935 to 1943 kept Americans (including American artists) working by creating projects that would benefit the public.

In Rochester, MAG director Gertrude Herdle Moore administered the WPA art program, while her sister, longtime curator Isabel Herdle, was on the program’s committee. By 1937, their project was called “the most interesting and effective outside of New York City” by the regional director of the Federal Art Project.

PICTURED: Carl W. Peters painting WPA mural Science and Humanity for the Academy of Medicine Museum, c. 1941. Carl W. Peters Papers, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation, University of Rochester River Campus Libraries.
The sisters were longtime champions of Peters, and this relationship would serve him well during the dark years of the Great Depression. He was awarded a coveted teaching position in MAG’s Creative Workshop and commissioned to paint scenes of local pride, peace, and plenty for the WPA mural project.

In 2009, MAG received a gift of more than 60 of Peters’s preparatory studies for the murals, from the family of Ellen W. and Thomas H. Miller, longtime friends of the artist and his wife. Beginning in 2012, the studies were conserved with funding from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network and the National Endowment for the Arts. Learn more about the project at mag.rochester.edu/murals/.

**Hours and admission**

Wednesday–Sunday 11 am to 5 pm and until 9 pm on Thursdays; closing at 3 pm December 24 and 31. Closed Mondays, Tuesdays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Year’s Day. Admission is $14; senior citizens, $10; college students with ID and children 6–18, $5. Always free to members, UR students, and children 5 and under. Half-price admission Thursdays from 5–9 pm is made possible in part by Monroe County.

**Programs and events**

These include a members’ opening party (October 17), an all-day symposium (October 18), two film screenings (October 18 and November 15); an educators’ inservice (October 21), and a presentation on songs of the Depression era by Michael Lasser (November 1). For detailed information see attached release.

**Catalog**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog with essays by cultural historian Karal Ann Marling; Joan Saab, UR associate professor of art history/visual and cultural studies; and Jessica Marten, MAG curator in charge/curator of American art. Available in the Gallery Store.

**Press contacts**

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**ART FOR THE PEOPLE: CARL W. PETERS AND THE ROCHESTER WPA MURALS**

**Programs and Events**

**MEMBERS’ PREVIEW PARTY**

*Saturday, October 17, 8–11 pm*

Free to MAG members, but reservations required; call (585) 276-8938 during business hours, email memberperks@mag.rochester.edu or register online.

Celebrate the exhibition ahead of the crowd with live music and entertainment!

- In the Pavilion, Jim E Leggs fuses pop, rock and R&B—and often adds congas for a Latin feel.
- In the M&T Bank Ballroom, Teagan and the Tweeds rock the room with their blues-country-folk vibe.
- Enjoy desserts and beverages for purchase from our party sponsor, Max at the Gallery.

**SYMPOSIUM**

“The Rochester WPA Murals: History/Legacy”

*Sunday, October 18, 10 am–5 pm; free, but preregistration required; call 585.276.8970*

Explore Rochester’s rich legacy of WPA art at an all-day program that includes:

- panel discussion featuring cultural historian Karal Ann Marling; Joan Saab, Univrsity of Rochester associate professor of art history/visual and cultural studies; and Jessica Marten, MAG curator in charge/curator of American art
- lunch provided by Max at the Gallery
- presentation by WALL\THERAPY founder, Dr. Ian Wilson
- presentation by art teacher Suzanne Curtice of Wilson Magnet High School, MJ Iuppa, Carmelo Ortiz and Carol Yost on the MAG-RCSD Student Mural Project “A World of Our Own”
- screening of “Enough to Live On: The Arts of the WPA” (open to the general public; see listing below)

*Sponsored by the Humanities Project, University of Rochester School of Arts & Sciences*

**FILM**

*Sunday, October 18 @ 3 pm and Sunday, November 15 @ 2 pm; included in museum admission*


**CONCERT**

*Sunday, November 1 @ 2 pm; included in museum admission*

Michael Lasser, Peabody Award-winning host of “Fascinatin’ Rhythm,” presents “Let’s Have Another Cup of Coffee: Songs of the Great Depression.”
ESPECIALLY FOR EDUCATORS
Wednesday, October 21, 4:30–7 pm; $25 (preregistration required*)

Area educators are invited to learn about the new exhibition *Art for the People: Carl W. Peters and the Rochester WPA Murals*.

To register or for more information, contact Amy LaPlante (585.276.8970).

GUIDED EXHIBITION TOURS  (included in museum admission)
Sunday, October 18 (opening day), 1, 2 and 3 pm
Sundays, October 25–January 3 @ 1 pm
Fridays, October 23 and 30 @ 2 pm
Fridays, November 6–December 18 @ 1 pm
ART FOR THE PEOPLE: CARL W. PETERS AND THE ROCHESTER WPA MURALS

Checklist

CARL W. PETERS SKETCHES AND STUDIES (1930-42)
All: Memorial Art Gallery, Gift in memory of the friendship of Ellen W. and Thomas H. Miller with Blanche and Carl W. Peters unless noted
- Studies for “Contemplative Life” Mural
- Studies for “Active Life” Mural
- Study for “English Fleet at Charlotte” Mural
- Study for “Triumph of the American Ideal” Mural
- Study for “Seneca - Iroquois” Mural
- Study for “Rev. René Galmées - The First Map and Father Peter Raffeix” Mural
- Study for “American Settlers” Mural
- Study for “The 19th Century” Mural
- Studies for “Algonquin Fishermen” Mural
- Study for “The French 1615-1763: The Explorer of the Genesee and Governor Denonville’s Army” Mural
- Study for an Unknown Mural Group
- Studies for “The Early Days of the Erie Canal” Mural
- Map of the Lake Ontario Area
- Studies for “Indian Allen” Mural
- Study for “White Woman of the Genesee” Mural
- Study of Hands
- Study for “Rochester, Past, Present, and Future” Mural
- Portrait of a Woman (Artist’s Assistant)
- Study of a Face, possibly for “Contemplative Life” Mural
- Study of Ears and a Baby’s Head
- Study for “The History of the Lake Ontario Region” Mural
- Group Study for “Active Life” Mural (Gift of Nancy Miller Batty in memory of Thomas H. and Ellen W. Miller)
- Study for “Contemplative Life” Mural (Gift of Nancy Miller Batty in memory of Thomas H. and Ellen W. Miller)

CARL W. PETERS PAINTINGS IN THE MEMORIAL ART GALLERY COLLECTION

- Memorial Bridge (1930)
  Oil on canvas
  Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin S. Wiitala in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Charles R. Weeth and Mr. and Mrs. Axel Wiitala
- Along the Genesee (1928)
  Oil on canvas
  Gift of Anna Roodenburg

MEMORIAL ART GALLERY ARCHIVES

- Federal Art Project exhibition pamphlet
  December 3, 1937–January 3, 1938

ERIK HANS KRAUSE ROCHESTER WPA POSTERS FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION (1935-41)

- Be Clean in Everything that Concerns Your Baby
- Nurse the Baby
- Unfair to Babies
- Expecting? Get the Right Advice from the Right Sources
- No Creature in this World So Ignorantly Nurtured
- Syphilis… Six Out of Ten Cured Because They Did Not Wait Too Long
- Syphilis: False Shame and Fear May Destroy Your Future
- Protect Her From Tuberculosis
- Fight Tuberculosis, Obey the Rules of Health
- Keep Clean
- Keep Your Teeth Clean
- Two WPA Poster Templates

DEPARTMENT OF RARE BOOKS, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND PRESERVATION, UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

- Work Relief Division Construction Report, Monroe County
  January 1, 1939–December 31, 1940
- Report on the Accomplishments of the Works Progress Administration, Rochester-Monroe County
  January 1–December 31, 1939

STRONG NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PLAY

- WPA: Work, Progress, Action board game
  E. E. Fairchild Corporation of Rochester, NY (1935-43)

ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY LOCAL HISTORY DIVISION (1935-43)

- Our Job with the WPA pamphlet
- WPA in the Flower City pamphlet
- A Cultural Service to the Community pamphlets

OTHER


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