

New Deal Art in Post Offices

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal sponsored several art programs to help get people back to work and restore confidence in a nation facing 25 percent unemployment in 1933.

From 1934 to 1943, the New Deal murals and sculpture seen in Post Offices were produced under the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, later called the Section of Fine Arts. Unlike the Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project, with which it often is confused, this program was not directed toward providing economic relief. Instead, the art placed in Post Offices was intended to help boost the morale of people suffering the effects of the Great Depression with art that, in the words of President Roosevelt, was:

*native, human, eager and alive — all of it painted by their own kind in their own country, and painted about things they know and look at often and have touched and loved.*¹

Artists competed anonymously in national and regional contests. Runners-up often received commissions for smaller buildings. After receiving a commission, an artist was encouraged to consult with the postmaster and other townspeople to ensure that the subject would be meaningful. In 2006, more than 1,150 Post Offices across the continental United States continued to house this uniquely American art for people to enjoy as they go about their daily lives.

Today, the murals and sculpture form a vital part of America's national heritage. Recognizing the importance of this collection, the United States Postal Service is making every effort to preserve and safeguard it for future generations. Also, to maintain the spirit of the section in placing artwork in Post Offices, postal policy provides for the relocation of these works into the new facility when a Post Office moves so the art can continue to enrich people during the normal course of their daily lives.

For more information on New Deal murals and sculpture, contact:

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Postman in Storm, Independence, Iowa
This oil on canvas mural by Robert Tabor might evoke empathetic shivers from visitors to the Independence, Iowa, Post Office at 200 2nd Avenue, Northeast. The mural was installed in January 1938 and restored in 2000.



Indian Bear Dance, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico
Installed in 1938, this 12-foot long, oil on canvas mural by Boris Deutsch is located in the Geronimo Retail Unit, 300 Main Street, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, Post Office. The retail unit is open 24 hours a day for postal customers and visitors interested in New Deal art.



Winter Landscape, Canton, Missouri

Artist Jessie Hull Mayer painted *Winter Landscape* in oil and tempera for the Canton, Missouri, Post Office, located at 500 Lewis Street, where it still can be seen. The mural was installed in 1940, with restoration work done in 1971 and 2005.



Air Mail, Piggott, Arkansas

Air Mail by painter Daniel Rhodes is a nearly 12-foot long work in oil on canvas. The public still can see this work of art, installed in 1941, when they visit the Piggott, Arkansas, Post Office, located at 116 North 3rd Avenue.

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Freedom of the Human Spirit Shall Go On," Address at the Dedication of National Gallery of Art, March 17, 1941. From University of California, *American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16091> (accessed February 5, 2007).