

Government priorities

Seymour Fogel's "Wealth of the Nation", installed in 1942 in a federal building in Washington DC, depicts a group of workers engaged in different kinds of labour. An architect kneels over a blueprint and behind him a muscular figure turns two cogwheels. They're flanked by a scientist peering through a microscope on one side and a pair of workers walking towards a factory on the other. The vibrant mural, writes John P. Murphy, "offers reassurance that the Depression's frightening uncertainties have been brought under control by new 'pioneers' securing the frontiers of science, technology, and industry".

The painting, commissioned by the US Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts, is a smart choice for the cover of *Murphy's New Deal Art*. The book, part of Thames and Hudson's "World of Art" series, recounts the role of art in President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal agenda to provide Americans security in the wake of financial collapse. Murphy, a curator and art historian at Vassar College, notes that art was an essential part of the New Deal: "For a decade between 1933 and 1943 the US government supported art as a necessity, not a luxury".

The mural depicts the order of things - the hierarchy of being and it was - the goal of it - was to provide Americans security in the wake of financial collapse. The book's accessible format invites readers to linger over the various artworks arrayed alongside the text. Perhaps unavoidably, the narrative sometimes gets stuck among descriptions of New Deal bureaucracy. One essential agency was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which included various public arts initiatives.

The WPA's Federal Art Project, Murphy writes, established community art centres that "provided art education, vocational training, studio space, lectures, performances, and exhibition opportunities to rural communities and under-resourced urban areas". In 1939, to help raise money for the community art centre on Chicago's South Side, Charles White painted "Five Great American Negroes", a mural depicting the celebrated Black figures Sojourner Truth,

painting slaves as if we were all slaves.

Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marian Anderson and George Washington Carver.

Photography is also part of the canon of New Deal art. Perhaps the most indelible image of the Depression is Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother", taken in 1936 at a pea pickers' camp in California. It captures a woman's look of anxiety as her children cling to her. The identity of the photograph's subject – Florence Owens Thompson, who was of Cherokee descent – remained unknown for decades.

¶ *New Deal Art* reveals the rich aesthetic tradition of impoverished times. But the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941¹ changed the calculus.¹ As the US moved toward a war footing, the government's desires and capacity to boost the arts would be overtaken by the need to defeat fascism.

In a single 2 page article about the depression relating it to what the U.S. may be about to go through. At one point the govt - then a govt was attacked and now, instead of supporting artists, they must mobilize to defeat fascism. Thus, the New World order seems to be defeated in what is taking place in Iran.

The govt - where the govt's desires to boost the arts is now overtaken by the need to defeat fascism.

