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Article Summary: During a time of economic crisis, the federal government commissioned works of art that reflected the "American Scene." Here are selected works from a current exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Thomas Kimball, Wilda Chase Reeder

Keywords: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, New Deal, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Civil Works Administration, Public Works of Art Program, Works Progress (then Projects) Administration

Nebraska New Deal Art Reproduced:

Wheels of Progress (Rose Cohen, Lincoln)

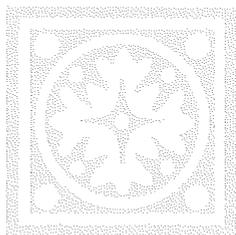
Chief Gall (Louise Ennis, Omaha)

R.F.D. (Lyman Byxbe, Omaha)

Map of Nebraska (Lillian Ibser, Lincoln)

Nebraska Farm (Gladys Lux, Lincoln)

Growth (Albert Leindecker, Scotia)



For the People:

Nebraska's New Deal Art

Selected works from a current exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum

BY DEB ARENZ

To most Americans, the stock market crash of 1929 marked the beginning of the Great Depression. While the crash certainly affected Nebraska, by the early 1930s other factors contributed to the state's bleak situation. Farm prices plummeted. Farmers were financially overextended, and faced drought and dust storms.

Like the rest of the country, Nebraska supported the progressive ideas of Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt. FDR began his presidency with a sweeping agenda of assistance programs known as the New Deal.

The New Deal included assistance to the jobless through federally-backed employment. In early 1933, the government established the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and its sub-agency the Civil Works Administration (CWA). They funded temporary employment programs during 1933-34. The first federal art project was the Public Works of Art Program (PWAP). It was part of the CWA and ran from December 1933 until June 1934.

The PWAP did more than provide much-needed jobs. In the words of Ernest Witte, administrator of FERA in Nebraska, it helped people "out of the despair of the spirit." It also stimulated artistic ambitions and interests. Program administrators felt that art benefitted society, and they encouraged PWAP artists to select subject matter from the "American Scene." They wanted art that was descriptive, recognizable, and accessible to all.

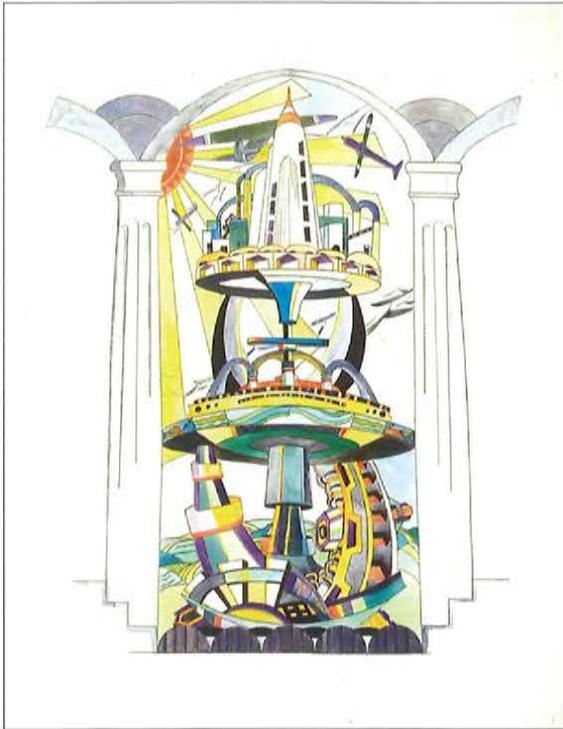
The program was administered by regional directors and volunteer advisory committees. In Nebraska, artists were chosen by Thomas R. Kimball, an Omaha architect, and Wilda Chase Reeder, a Fremont artist and art teacher. They made their selections based on qualifications and financial need, and classified them as "A" or "B" according to skill. (Not all of the artists had formal training.) "B" artists received \$26.50 per week (\$421.63 today). "A" artists received almost twice as much.

In all, PWAP employed thirty-two Nebraskans. Much of their work was displayed around the state in tax-supported buildings. Although the program ended in 1934, federally funded art projects continued under the United States Treasury and the Works Progress (then Projects) Administration.

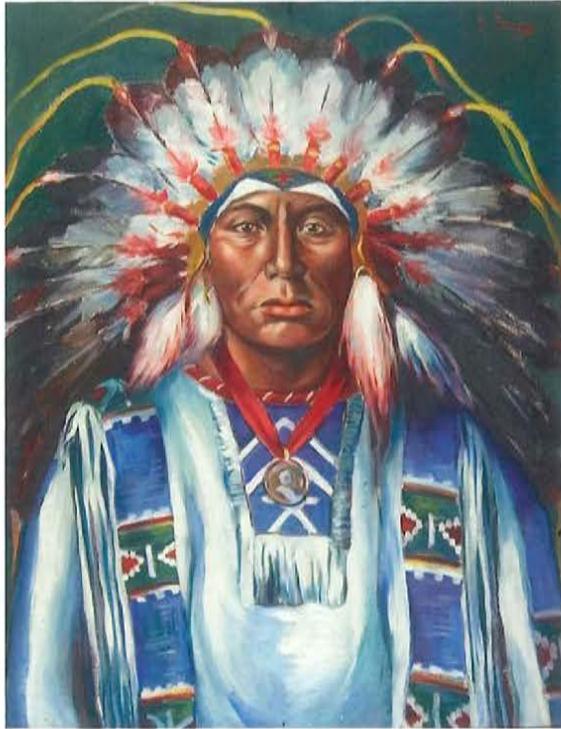
The art in this exhibit—six examples of which are reproduced here—was produced for the PWAP, and remains property of the United States Government. The Nebraska State Historical Society maintains this collection on long-term loan so that it can be exhibited periodically for the benefit of all Nebraskans.

The exhibit *For the People: Nebraska's New Deal Art* runs through October 3, 2010. All artwork in this exhibit is courtesy of the Fine Arts Program, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration Commissioned through the New Deal art projects. ☐

Deb Arenz is curator of museum collections at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln.



Left: *Wheels of Progress*, Rose Cohen, Lincoln. Ink on paper. As with several other artists in this exhibit, we have no further information about Cohen. NSHS 743p-124

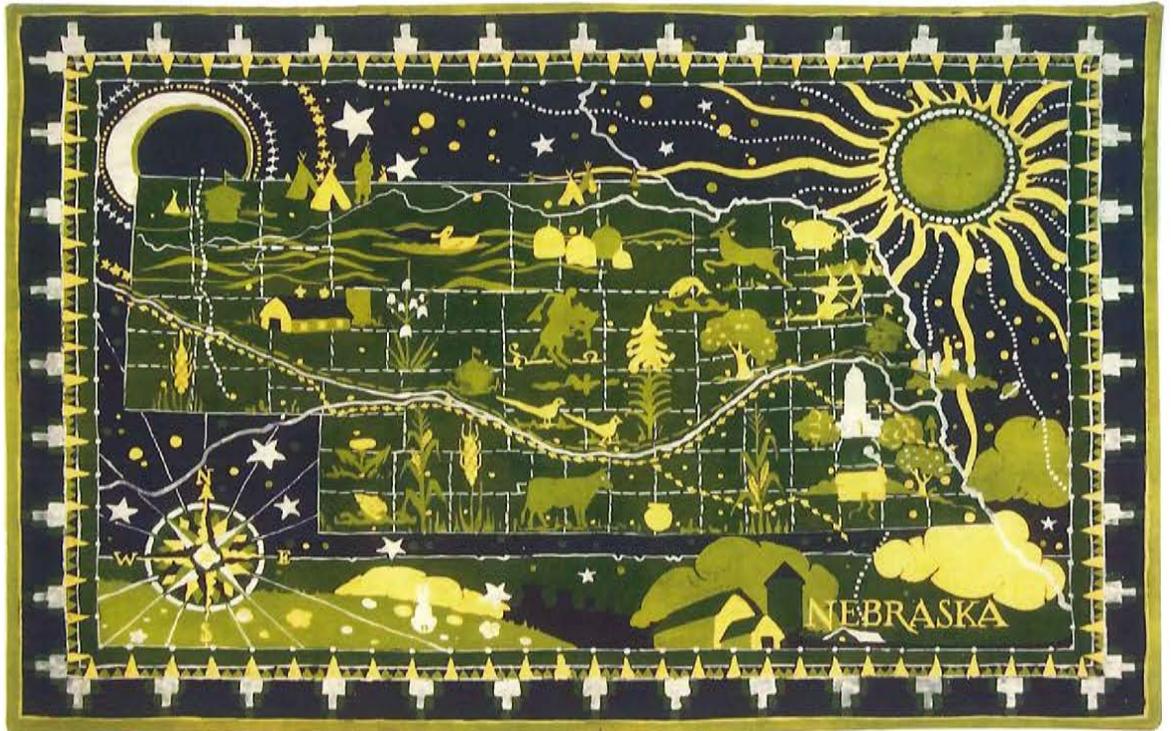


Right: *Chief Gall*, Louise Ennis, Omaha. Oil on canvas. Louise Ennis was born in Colorado in 1909 and came to Nebraska in 1919. She trained at Broadmoor Art Academy under Augustus Dunbier and was active as a painter and photo colorist during the 1930s. Her Indian portraits were copied from early photographs obtained from the Nebraska State Historical Society. 743p-061

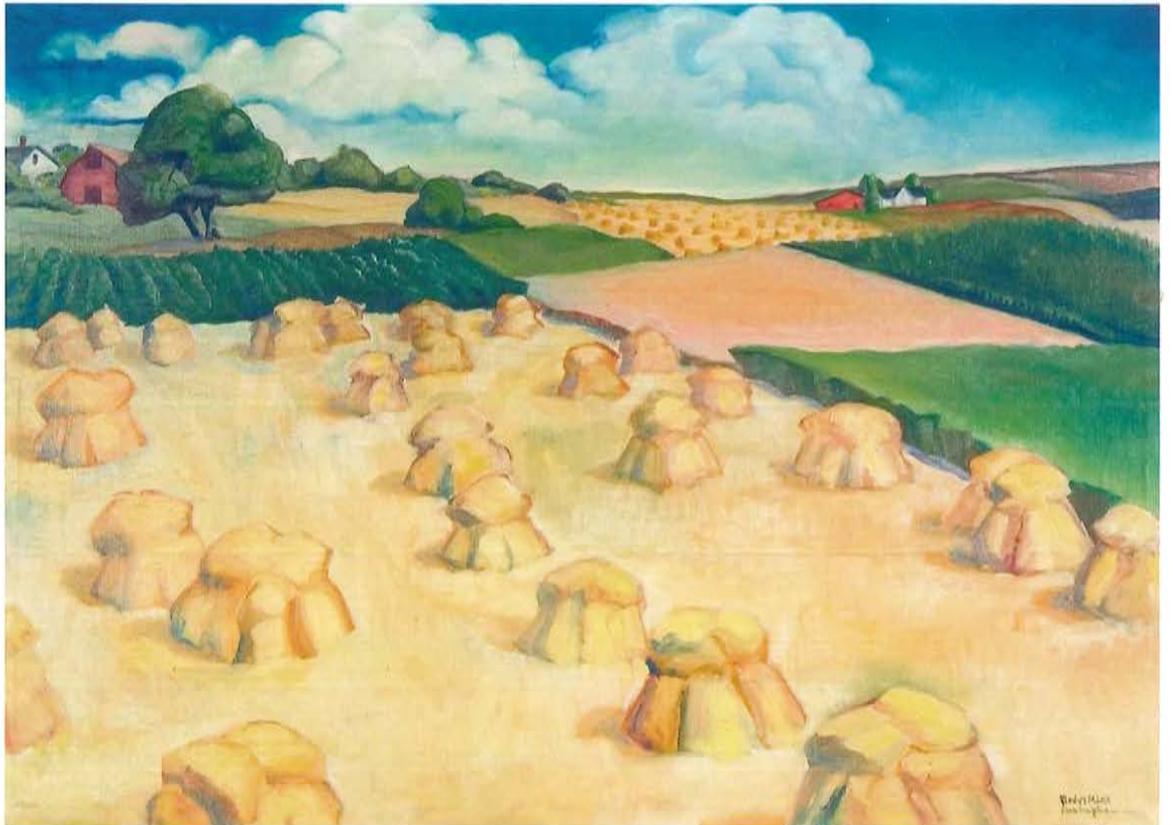


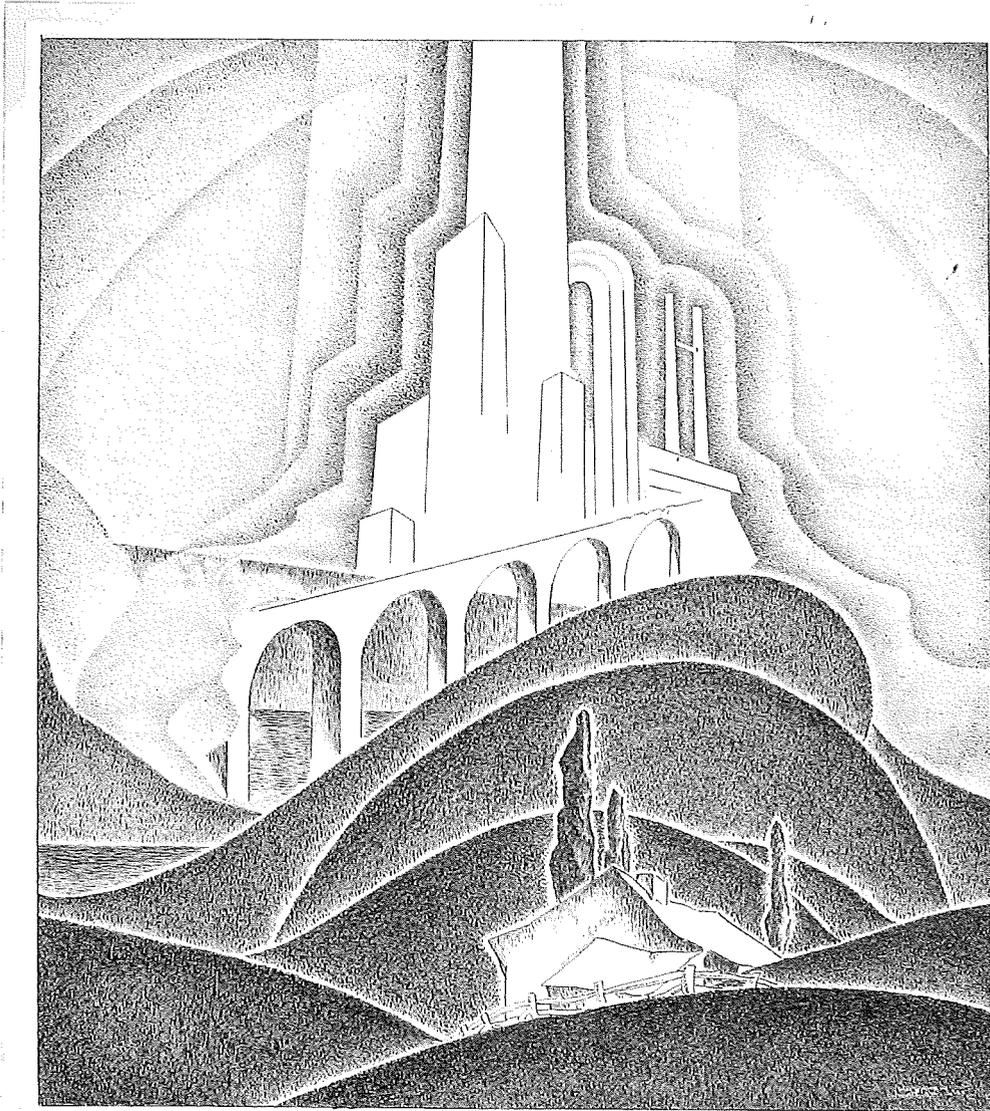
R.F.D., Lyman Byxbe, Omaha. Etching. Lyman Byxbe was born in 1886 in Illinois. In 1909 he joined the army and was stationed in Omaha, where he remained for many years. There he worked for the most part as a commercial engraver. Byxbe had a one-man exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1937-1938, as well as shows at the University of Nebraska State Museum and the Joslyn Art Museum. In 1939, Byxbe and his family moved to Estes where he continued to work successfully as an artist until his death in 1980. NSHS 743p-031-03

Map of Nebraska, Lillian Ibser, Lincoln. Batik. NSHS 743p-168-01



Nebraska Farm, Gladys Lux, Lincoln. Oil on canvas. Born near Chapman, Nebraska, in 1899, Gladys Lux received bachelors and masters degrees from the University of Nebraska and further training at the Chicago Art Institute. She taught art at Nebraska Wesleyan University from 1927 to 1967 and was head of the Art Department for many years. Lux's work was featured in local and regional venues including the Joslyn Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, Rockefeller Center in New York City, and the 1939 New York World's Fair. She donated the historic building which now houses the Lux Center for the Arts in Lincoln. NSHS 743p-142





Growth, Albert Leindecker, Scotia. Ink on paper. NSHS 743p-108-01