At The State Museum

Gallery Talk Schedule
Presented in the exhibition area on the museum’s first floor, A Common Canvas gallery talks are free to the public on a first-come, first-served basis. No registration is required. A guided tour will follow each gallery talk.

Saturday, January 24, 2009, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.
“Pennsylvania’s New Deal Post Office Murals”
David Lembeck, Independent Scholar and co-curator of A Common Canvas

Saturday, February 21, 2009, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.
“Black Participation in Philadelphia’s New Deal Arts Projects”
Arthur Jarvis, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of History, Montgomery County Community College

Sunday, March 8, 2009, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.
“Story Murals”
Douglas Cooper, Civic Muralist, and Professor of Architecture, Carnegie Mellon University

For a contemporary perspective, reproductions of two murals Mr. Cooper created for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission’s headquarters in Harrisburg are on display adjacent to A Common Canvas.

Guided Tours
Second Saturdays
December 2008 through May 2009, second Saturday of each month, starting at 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m., approximately 30 minutes in length
Location: A Common Canvas, first floor gallery
“Second Saturday” exhibit tours are free and open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis; no registration is required.

Palace of Art: The State Capitol Murals of Edwin Austin Abbey & Violet Oakley
Saturday, April 4, 2009, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.
Nancy Mendes, M.F.A., Graphic Arts Director, The State Museum of Pennsylvania
Location: The State Capitol Rotunda
Free to the public, but reservations are suggested; please call The State Museum’s reservation office at (717) 772-6997.

Group Tours of A Common Canvas
School age and Adult
April through May 2009, Mondays, 9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., or 1:00 p.m.; approximately 30 minutes in length
Free of charge, but limited to groups of 20 and must be scheduled in advance.
To arrange a group tour, please call the museum’s reservation office at (717) 772-6997.

For more information on A Common Canvas exhibition programs and resources on the historic post office murals, visit www.statemuseumpa.org

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A Common Canvas is a program of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s celebration of the 75th anniversary of the New Deal.
A Common Canvas is supported in part with grants from the Auchincloss Family Fund of The Foundation for Enhancing Communities (FEC) on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. S. Sloan Auchincloss, and the Shearer Family Fund of FEC on behalf of R. Scott and Kathy T. Shearer.

(Above) U.S. Post Office Building, Selinsgrove (detail): Internationally acclaimed for his post-World War II abstract kinetic sculptures, George Rickey had painted Susquehanna Trail featuring farmers working a field in 1939.
(Front panel) United States Post Office and Courthouse, Pittsburgh (detail): Howard Norton Cook studied Mexican mural art. His Steel Industry (1936) recalls the works of master muralist Diego Rivera. Cook’s piece was later selected as the cover for the Pennsylvania volume of the WPA American Guide series. Photograph courtesy of the General Services Administration, Fine Arts Program.

NOVEMBER 22, 2008 – MAY 17, 2009
THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA
A COMMON CANVAS
PENNSYLVANIA’S NEW DEAL POST OFFICE MURALS

In cooperation with
PENNSYLVANIA HERITAGE SOCIETY
and the Friends of the State Museum of Pennsylvania

The State Museum of Pennsylvania
300 North Street • Harrisburg, PA 17120-0024
(717) 787-4980 • www.statemuseumpa.org

Administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
In 1933, the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt announced an ambitious program to place murals and sculptures in public buildings across the country. Administered by the U.S. Treasury Department through its Section of Fine Arts, the program embraced both the practical and philosophical goals of the New Deal. Artists were provided meaningful work and, in turn, original works of art were made available to ordinary Americans. The Section encouraged its artists to paint "the American scene," an approach which emphasized depictions of everyday life. To make them accessible, most artworks were installed in post office lobbies, the most public of all public buildings.

Between 1934 and 1943, Pennsylvania received 94 commissions, a number second only to New York. The artwork, which included both murals and sculptures, was widely distributed across the state and represented a broad cross-section of Pennsylvania communities, from rural hamlets and mining towns to urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Each commission aimed to capture something intrinsically important about the community for which it was created. As a result, Pennsylvania's collection is unusually diverse. The artworks featured in this exhibition have been organized into five major themes: Agriculture, Coal & Steel, History, Town & Country, and Industry. Each featured artwork is also identified by the town for which it was commissioned.

In celebrating the dignity of everyday life, Treasury Department murals were intended to lift the spirits of a Depression-weary America. Today, these same artworks—brought together for the first time in this special exhibition—offer a common canvas of a Pennsylvania that has faded from the landscape, but not from memory.