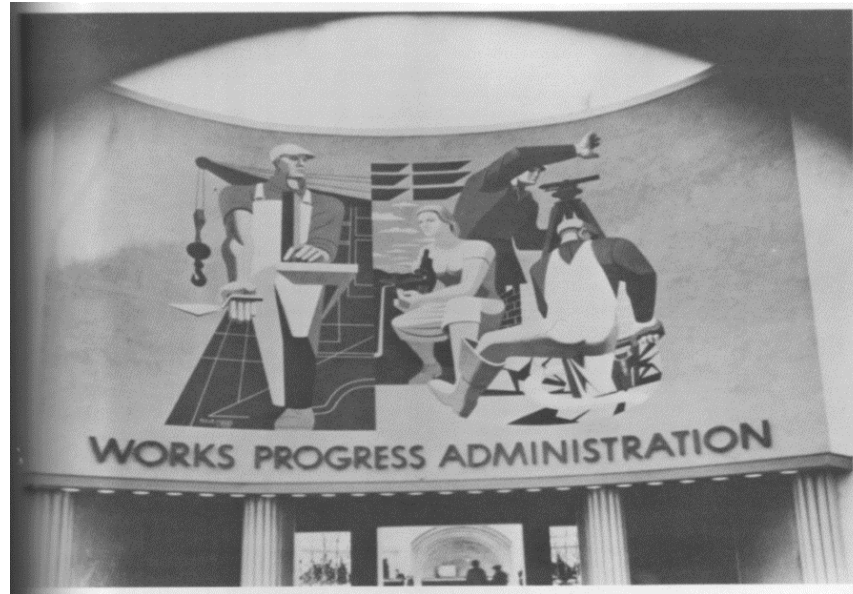


*A theory of art with instrumental value to the state,
with case studies from the New Deal*



WPA Pavilion
at 1939 World's Fair,
Queens, NY USA

Cameron M Weber
ACEI Melbourne June 2018

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

A shared ideology in the cultural economics research program is that art economists believe art contains value beyond, or in addition to, exchange-value (Weber 2017 *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*).

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Arjo Klamer 2016 *Doing the Right Thing: A Value Based Economy* writes,

“David Throsby, a fellow cultural economist, is pursuing a value-based approach as well. In a discussion of cultural goods, like paintings and theatre performances, he lists an often-cited set of six values that pertain to such goods: aesthetic value, spiritual value, symbolic value, social value, symbolic value and authenticity. Each of these values point at a particular quality of the artwork (Throsby, 2001). This list demonstrates the multi-faceted character of an artwork. But when we are interested in the *realization of values* we need more” (55).

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What is not adequately addressed in the art economics research program is that art can have *instrumental value*.

The main point to our present research is that we use political economy to build a model describing how art can realize *instrumental value* for a self-interested state.

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Motivation for research:

Disappointment in the american project, allegedly designed to be first polity with limited government since the Roman Republic, now: largest debt created in history; more people per capita working for the state than 'communist' china; and, 100m people (almost 1/3 of population) receiving food aid

What changes Enlightenment ideals of self-determination (manifested with preferences as consumer sovereignty) into the modern welfare state?

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Motivation for research (cont):

Interest in value theory (axiology)

We start following Hume that all people have capacity for appreciating and realizing the aesthetic sublime

Political economy requires the use of fiscal sociology to account for a self-interested state, not possible with the orthodox economics view of the state as benevolent

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Motivation for research (cont):

Jason Scott Smith (2006, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956*) finds that the massive federal public works of the New Deal inculcate in the population preferences for a larger role for the federal government in people's lives, including the institutionalization of interventionist Keynesian economics, and, rule by experts

We explore how the art created under the New Deal helps to accomplish the same

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Approach:

Research is heterodox cultural economics as attempts to theorize how preferences are formed, rather than accept preferences as given (and then revealed) as in most orthodox economics

Throsby (2001, *Economics and Culture*) and Potts (2014 in *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*) introduce shared preference-creation but do not build heuristics as to how this might be accomplished in political economy as we do here

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First we build a model of a self-interested state using public art for its own purposes (something we can call *art statism*).

Next we introduce examples of art-statism in the art production of the Roosevelt Administration during the New Deal and World War Two as found in the archives.

The case-study approach allows us to interpret *intent* in the state art-production.

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Our concept of the state starts with Max Weber [1919] *Politics as a Vocation* where the state in a democracy,

- 1) Claims a “monopoly of legitimate physical violence”,
- 2) Rules over others with this perceived legitimacy, and
- 3) Strives for power “for its own sake”

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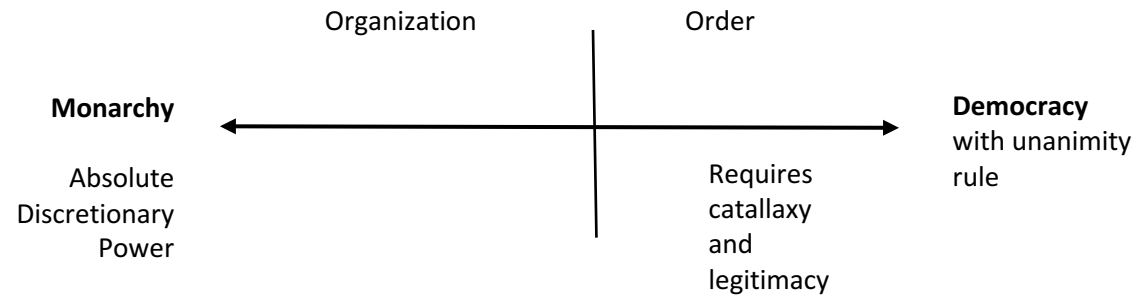
Further, Anthony de Jasay 1998 *The State* finds that the state has self-interest, where he “consider(s) the state as a live institution which behaves as if it has a will of its own and a single hierarchy of ends....”

A self-interested state seeks to grow its (legitimate) discretionary power,

Instead of saying, tautologically, that the rational state pursues its interests and maximizes its ends, whatever they are, I propose to adopt, as a criterion of rationality, that it seeks to maximize its discretionary power.

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Richard Wagner 2009 *Fiscal Sociology and the Theory of Public Finance* creates a dichotomy and continuum for forms of government. A self-interested state seeks to move leftward along this continuum as it grows its discretionary power.

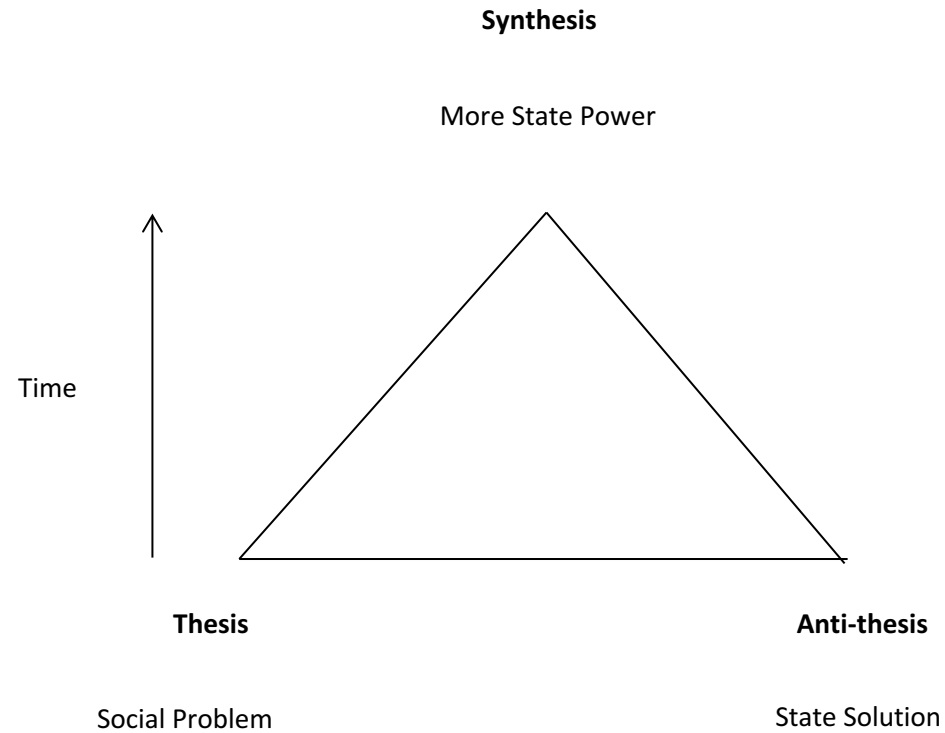


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State art production can use ‘fear’ and ‘hope’ in those experiencing public art to create preferences for a larger for the state in society.

“It is quite obvious that in reality this compliance [with a legitimate state] is the product of interests of the most varied kinds, but chiefly hope and fear” (Max Weber [1919] 2004, 34).

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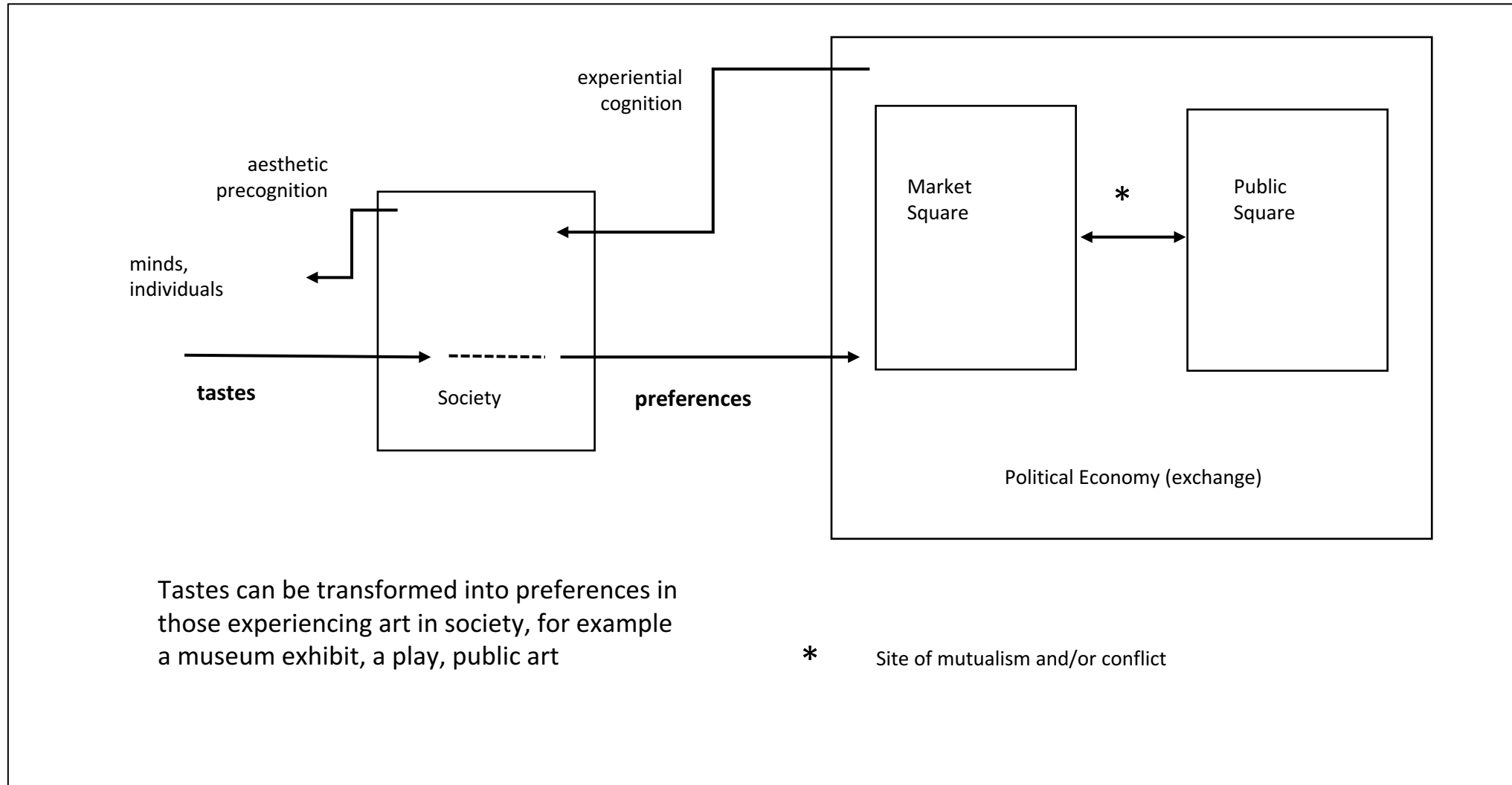


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Wagner 2007 uses binary structure of mind theory,

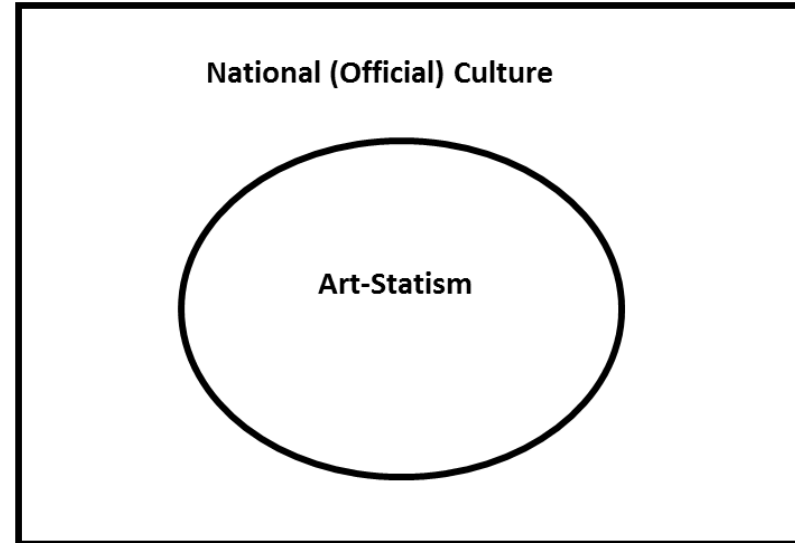
“I work with a bi-directional relationship between mind and society. From one direction, the interaction among minds generates and transforms societal formations; from the other direction, those formations channel and shape both the ends people choose to pursue and the means they employ in doing so” (21).

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A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

Public art does not always realize instrumental value to the state. It is only art-statism when the state is trying to grow its discretionary power while at the same time maintaining its legitimacy.



For example, is placing the US Constitution in the US History Museum In Washington DC (and making admissions free) a form of art-statism or only national culture?

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Bourdieu 1984
finds that social
realism is readily
decoded by the
working classes

This art creates Fear

Ben Shahn's "The Meaning of Social Security" (ca. 1940), Washington, DC

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(COPY) Please return to the section of -see
Art. July 1944

Jersey Homesteads
Hightstown, New Jersey
November 7, 1940

Mr. Edward B. Rowan
Section of Fine Arts
Federal Works Agency
Washington, D. C.

Dear Ed:

Following is a detailed description of the content of
the Social Security Building sketches, with titles for the
separate panels.

Your choice of the quotation from President Roosevelt's
message to Congress has stood me in good stead. Since
I have an embarrassment of riches in social security
material - both in feeling and in data - I have taken
the President's words around which to build the mural.
They afford a much-needed limitation as well as a motif:-

"Among our objectives, I place the security of
the men, women and children of the Nation first.

"This security for the individual and for the
family concerns itself primarily with three factors.
People want decent homes to live in; they want to
locate them where they can engage in productive
work; and they want some safeguard against mis-
fortunes which cannot be wholly eliminated from
this man-made world of ours."

(West Wall) Thus, I have used the long unobstructed wall on the west
side of the building to interpret the meaning of social
security, and to show something of its accomplishments.
On this wall I have developed the following themes:

"Work" "The Family" "Social Security"

As a plastic means of emphasizing these themes I have
placed each group over a doorway in large scale, pro-
jecting them somewhat forward from the rest of the mural.

The Family
Work

Using the Family as a central theme, over the middle door, I
have placed over the left door, the theme of Work, over
the right that of Security. Immediately surrounding the

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Hope:
The state solution
to the social problem

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-2-

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Security
ousing
Public Works
Recreation
The Harvest

Family are, on the right side, the building of homes, on the left, a suggestion of tremendous public works, furnishing employment and benefiting all of society. At the extreme left of the panel are seen youths of a slum area engaged in healthy sport in handball courts. At the extreme right is seen the Harvest--threshing and fruit-gathering, obvious symbols of security, suggesting also security as it applies to the farm family.

Thus, for the west wall, we have:

THE

WORK	FAMILY	Social Security	Harvest
Recreation	Public Works	HOUSING	Harvest

West Wall

(East Wall)

Since the panels of the east wall are recessed, and because the evils of insecurity are being ameliorated, I have used that wall to portray the insecurity of men, women and children.

Unemployment

Unemployment being the greatest cause of insecurity, I have devoted to it the large central panel. I have tried to give the feeling of endless waiting, men standing and waiting, men sitting and waiting, the man and boy going wearily into the long empty perspective of a railroad track. Against a background of the typical stark, unlovely company house, I have placed in close proximity waiting men and discarded machines.

Child Labor

The panel to the left depicts the insecurities of childhood. The little girl of the mills opens doors to show us breaker boys working in a mine. The crippled boy issuing from the mine symbolizes the perils of child labor. To the right, a homeless boy is seen sleeping in the street; another child leans from a tenement window.

Old Age

The panel to the right shows the insecurity of dependents--the aged and infirm woman, the helpless mother with her small child.

Thus, the three panels of the east wall:-

Child Labor

Unemployment


old age

East Wall

Fear:
The social problem(s)

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more disc



TREASURY DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON
January 27, 1944
War Finance Division

*I hope the gang in the
are putting
D. Malcher
Bonds*

Mr. Ben Shahn
Jersey Homesteads
New Jersey

Dear Ben:

Let us put in writing the details of the poster we need.

I am asking our administrative office to send you a purchase order in the sum of \$30 to cover a rough sketch. If you then go ahead and make for us on the basis of an approved sketch the finished artwork, I will arrange for another purchase order in the sum of \$270.


This seems to be the way to handle things from the red tape viewpoint and as I recall our conversation it is an arrangement you approve of.

What we are thinking of is a poster for display in high schools to appeal to boys and girls who are working and earning pretty good wages. In many schools 70 or 80 percent of the kids are working and often earning from \$15 to \$30 per week — sometimes more. This summer they'll probably go on a full time basis.

Too often these students are touched for 10% at the plant — the same percentage as the family man. They then come to school and explain that they have done their part.

Another phase of this attitude is the feeling among the boys "Well ~~what~~ I'm doing ~~and~~ planning to go into the Air Corps at the end of the year, I guess I'm doing all anybody would ask".

We would like to get across to these young earners these points: (1) once you're in the service you'll wish to God you had improved your chances by investing the limit when you had the money; (2) You'll hope that the kids still in school are investing 90% instead of 10%; and (3) you owe it to your older friends now in service to back them to the limit.



D148.155

I have been thinking in terms of a poster depicting a young looking boy in uniform under extremely uncomfortable looking combat conditions — perhaps a soaked, shivering youngster diving into a mud-filled slit fence to escape a strafing's bullets and muttering fervently "I hope the gang in school are putting 90% into War Bonds."

I am quite clear on the objectives of this poster and not necessarily prejudiced as any one means of achieving these objectives.

I certainly will appreciate it if you can give the problem some thought and let us have a sketch as to what you think would be a good solution.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Malcher
Daniel Malcher
Acting Director
Education Section
War Finance Division

*letter of Mar. 9 asked S. for sketch because 2 or 3
mag.'s are interested in reprinting poster*

DM:mal

148.156

Fear and
Hope in
time of war

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

“Our theory would not be a social theory if it had no sting in its tail, no indirect, roundabout secondary effects and no “feedback loops.” Thus, it is entirely likely that once the state has made people observe the cult of Bach, *and* they have in due course taught themselves to like it, they will “identify” better with the state which gave them their tastes [preferences, *sic*]. Likewise, the splendor of the presidential palace, the achievement of national greatness and “being first on the moon” may in the end implant in the public consciousness a certain sense of the state’s legitimacy, a perhaps growing willingness to obey it regardless of hope of gain and fear of loss. Hence, they may serve as a cunning and slow-acting substitute for buying consent” (Jasay 1989, 270, *emphasis in original*).

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Conclusion:

To say that *some* public art is art-statism is not say that *all* public art is art-statism. It is only when the state seeks to increase its discretionary power in a democracy using art as the instrument that we have art-statism.

Some public art may be national culture-building, helping to legitimize the state, not seeking increased state discretionary power.

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Conclusion (cont):

- Although the difference between national culture and art-statism may be a subjectively fine-line, it is anticipated that this research may bring value to the art economics research program which to-date has underestimated the role that public art can play in creating preferences for more state coercion in society to the detriment of voluntary and personalized cooperation.

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state, and applied case studies from the New Deal art production in the USA

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

June 8th, 1936

Dear Mr. --

The Federal Art Project is opening a national show of paintings, water colors and designs for murals at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1600 Twenty-First Street, Northwest, on June 15th. The exhibition will continue until July 5th. ~~It is my~~ hope that you will find it possible to attend the private review of the exhibition on Monday, June 15th, ~~between 6 and 8 p.m.~~

A group of about one hundred works has been chosen for the exhibition. This group presents a cross-section of what has been accomplished under the Federal Art Project, especially by the younger artists whose work is little known to the general public. ~~I believe~~ ^{I believe} the work shows a great deal of vitality and vigor of expression and a wide range in the choice of subject matter. ~~It seems to me that~~ ^{It is} an exhibition which everyone interested in the white collar projects of the Works Program ^{should see.} ^{will want to}

Yours very sincerely,

Jacob Baker
Assistant Administrator

time?
We

I hope you can come in on June 15th,

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
WALKER-JOHNSON BUILDING
1734 NEW YORK AVENUE NW.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

HARRY L. HOPKINS
ADMINISTRATOR

June 9, 1936

Dear Mr.

The Federal Art Project is opening a national show of paintings, water colors and designs for murals at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1600 Twenty-First Street, Northwest, on June 15th. The exhibition will continue through July 5th. We hope that you will find it possible to attend the private review of the exhibition on Monday, June 15th, from two to six P.M.

A group of about one hundred works has been chosen for the exhibition. This group presents a cross-section of what has been accomplished under the Federal Art Project, especially by the younger artists whose work is little known to the general public.

The work shows a great deal of vitality and vigor of expression and a wide range in the choice of subject matter. It is an exhibition which I believe everyone interested in the white collar projects of the Works Program will want to see. I hope you can come on June 15th.

Yours very sincerely,

Jacob Baker *Holger Cahill*
Assistant Administrator *title*

afford
JS

Public art must maintain its legitimacy under the guise of voluntary acceptance