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Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art Production Can Create Preferences in
Voters for a State with Greater Discretionary Power, with Case Studies from the
New Deal

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Abstract

We create a political economy model where the State can use art-production to increase its discretionary power. Wagner (2007) describes a continuum of forms of government from Democracy to Monarchy. The “Order” (towards the democracy pole) requires catallaxy and legitimacy and an “Organization” (along the monarchy pole of the continuum) less so. An individual experiences social relations (society), in our case experiencing public art, for example an art exhibit, a mural or a play, with an aesthetic where the State is solving most everyone’s problems. These tastes are then converted into actionable voter preferences for the State solution to society’s problems. We use case studies from the National Archives and Harvard University to provide data on how the art programs under the New Deal are actively engaged by the State to send the right codes and how this art-production was changed during its production to ensure and enlarge State legitimacy.

Keywords: Endogenous preferences, homo politicus, public choice, methodological individualism, art-statism

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I. Introduction

This research is heterodox public choice economics in method, as explores individual *endogenous* preference-creation in political economy. Economists in general like to assume *given* preferences enter the trade-space and are revealed in catallaxy, although there is some room for adaptive preferences within choice systems in the public choice literature (Brennan 2008b, Leininger 2009, Linhart and Shikano 2009, Shepsle and Weingast 2012). Our paper takes a different direction by exploring how preferences might be endogenously formed and realized in a political economy of art in a more general model. We are interested in the “feedback effects between institutions and motivations” (Brennan 2008a, 432) without a possibly-deterministic choice-space.

We are working more within the decision-making paradigm of *homo politicus* than *economicus* and within the concept that decision-making in religion and politics although rational may be non-logical (Wagner 2017, 119-120)² and based on expressive (or ideological) images as simple as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (Brennan 2008b, 482). and as decoded by those experiencing these images.

The normative assessment of market and political processes cannot, therefore, be conducted entirely on *a priori* institutional grounds. Put another way, if *homo economicus* and *homo politicus* differ - as the expressive account of voting says they are likely to - then comparison of market and electoral politics has to make a direct normative comparison of expressive and market *preferences*. This kind of exercise is a difficult one for economists: we prefer to compare outcomes, taking preferences as given. We like to settle such questions by direct appeal to consumer sovereignty. But consumer sovereignty and voter sovereignty are not the same; and it seems like an evasion of the normative issues to assert the superiority of the former on *a priori* grounds (Brennan 2008, 488).

Art is a combination of images, some more easily decoded than others. In fact it is the cognition and ordering of images which helps individuals to navigate an increasingly complex and depersonalized world (Boulding 1956, esp. 97-114).³ In our heuristic we model how a self-interested state can use publically-funded art to create (voting) preferences for a larger discretionary role for the state in society,

² In this paradigm decision-making in the economic (as opposed to political) sphere as a general principle is both rational and logical. See cf. Jung 1957 on the ‘mass man’ (non-rational) psychology created with partisan politics and organized religion in complex modern societies.

³ “For an insightful examination of the significance of images for thinking about society and social processes, see Kenneth Boulding (1956),” Eusepi and Wagner 2017, p. 164, en 2.

and our archival research has shown that state-produced images are planned and sometimes changed during art-production to encode the ‘good’ image.

After building a model of a self-interested state using public art for its own purposes (something we call *art statism*), we introduce examples of art-statism in the art production in the Roosevelt Administration during the New Deal and World War Two as found in the archives. We use the case-study method here to illustrate art-statism in that our archival research has allowed us to study the *intent* of the New Deal art-production as it is occurring.⁴ We find that some of this art production correlates with the state’s behaviour as predicted by our model. We find, however, that just because some public art may be art-statism, not all public art can be attributed to a self-interested state.

II. State theory

We use the work of Max Weber whose writings underpin our concept of the modern democratic state to help us develop the concept of art-statism. In *Politics as a Vocation* [1919] we learn of the state’s legal monopoly on violence, that in a democracy the state must maintain a sense of legitimacy, and that those active in politics seek power and prestige.

Nowadays, in contrast, we must say that the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory – and this idea of “territory” is an essential defining feature (33, *emphasis in original*).⁵

[T]he state represents a relationship in which people *rule over* other people. This relationship is based on the legitimate use of force (that is to say force that is perceived as legitimate)” (34, *emphasis in original*).

⁴ The case-study approach can be used more widely of course than just New Deal art-production, see my dissertation (New School for Social Research 2015) for other examples, available <http://cameroneconomics.ipower.com/dissertation.html>. The references to this paper also contain several studies which evaluate the links between the state, politics and art, however, none of these references create a model as we do here to help understand the inter-relationships among public art, voter preference-creation and state self-interest for increased discretionary power as existential.

⁵ For example, there are more than 1,000 US military troops in 16 countries, <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-military-personnel-deployments-by-country-2017-3>.

Whoever is active in politics strives for power, either power as a means in the service of other goals, whether idealistic or selfish, or power “for its own sake,” in other words so as to enjoy the feeling of prestige that it confers (33-34).⁶

If we find that public art conforms to Max Weber’s categories for defining the modern democratic state, and, *importantly*, further that the art creates preferences for more discretionary power for the state (realizing instrumental value for the state), then we have art-statism.⁷

We now introduce the work of Anthony de Jasay (1998) to assign agency to a self-interested state, a state that, under democracy, must maintain its perceived legitimacy.⁸ Jasay begins analysis by stating that there are two first principle ways to evaluate the state. The first is to ascribe the state as being an “inanimate tool, a machine” without ends, as only individuals have aspirational ends. In this view for Jasay the state is a tool manipulated by others for their own ends. The second way to view the state, and that preferred by Jasay, is to “merge the state and the people who run it, and consider the state as a live institution which behaves as if it has a will of its own and a single hierarchy of ends....” Jasay chooses this latter analytical lens “because it looks the most fertile in plausible deductive consequences.” This is not to propose that the state and its representatives do not engage in what we might conceive as benevolence, only that it is not scientific to hypothesize that this is the state’s only motive.⁹

⁶ Brennan (2008a) finds three main categories defining supply-side characteristics of those running for office, “a special liking for public attention”, “strong views about ‘doing good’”, and/or those “who enjoy the exercise of power over others” (435). Brennan also finds that supply-side political agency has been underdetermined in public choice theory relative to political theory, we address this weakness in our heuristic of a self-interested state. Our state has more agency than one which “operate(s) more or less as ciphers for voter interests” (Brennan 2008a, 434).

⁷ Frankel (2006) uses the term “print statism” to describe the US and British government publications of the 19th century and Cohen (2006) describes the “worker statism” of the New Deal which came to replace the voluntary mutualism before the depression and the Roosevelt Administration.

⁸ The discussion here on Jasay summarizes *The State* (1998, 266-273), “Towards a Theory of the State” subchapter. For ease of narrative we omit specific page references to the passages used, all of which are found in the noted subchapter.

⁹ Further Jasay writes that even if the state was a benevolent dictator it could not pursue the general will and “the interests of its subjects unless they were homogenous.” The reason for this

The state seeks power of will, 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.” The state pursues power beyond reproduction of its power as the state realizes it must gain in power in order to continue its privilege, its monopoly on legal coercion, on legal violence. However, in doing so the state must “implant in the public consciousness a certain sense of the state’s legitimacy.” Jasay believes that the state may seek increased power for *existential* reasons alone, “It would be rational [and logical, *sic*] for a state pursuing its own ends to escape from the treadmill where its power is used up in its own reproduction.”

Wagner (2007) develops a sociology of the state, and uses an ideal-type dichotomy to describe two forms of government, the “Organization” and the “Order,” see Exhibit 1 below. We find that state organizations have goals and the discretionary power to realize these goals, with the pole of an absolute monarchy on the left-hand side of the continuum. In the ideal-type an absolute monarchy does not have to negotiate its actions with the citizenry through catallactics. Juxtaposed with an organization we have the order occupying the right half of the continuum, with the most democratic order being one with an unanimity rule, or the *liberum veto*. An order is “an institutionally-mediated order of human interaction” requiring consent and legitimacy due to electoral politics (Wagner 2007, 7).

is because the state’s “adversarial relationship to them [its subjects, *sic*] is inherent in its having to take one side or another between conflicting interests,” for example consumers (most everyone) versus domestic producers (certain people) in any industrial policy action preventing free-trade over the long-term.

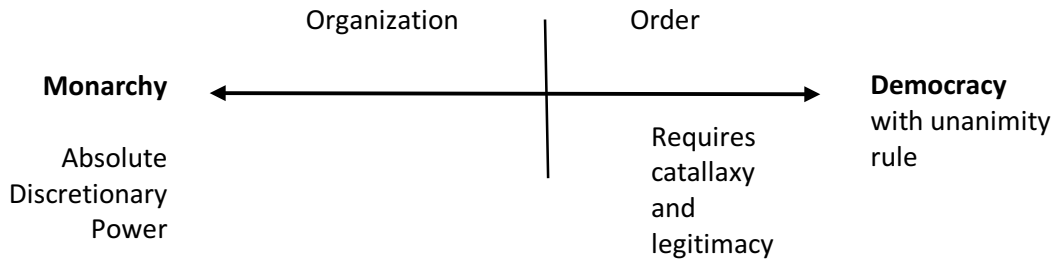


Exhibit 1: Dichotomy and Continuum between the “Organization” and “Order” Forms of Government. Diagram by author, adapted from ideas found in Wagner (2007).

A self-interested state can be seen as attempting to move leftward along the Organization – Order continuum, balancing the seeking of an increase in power with the necessity of maintaining legitimacy. Jasay finds that as the state transitions from a process-oriented government representing the people in a *polis* (Wagner’s “order”), it metamorphosizes into something else (Wagner’s “organization”), which might be of alarm to some people (or at the least to Jasay). A state which has increased its power is not degenerative for the state itself, but this new situation is negative only over whom the state rules.

Making itself less dependent on subject’s consent, and making it harder for rivals to compete, would amount to improving the environment instead of adjusting to it.... I would not accept that, like Plato’s Republic on its way from democracy to despotism, the state ‘degenerates’ in the process. If it has improved its ability to fulfill its ends, it has not degenerated, though it may well have become less apt to serve the ends of the observer, who would then have every reason to be alarmed by the change (Jasay 1998, 272-273, emphasis in original).

III. Building a model for preference-creation

A self-interested state in a democracy must maintain its legitimacy while pursuing its increased discretionary power. State art-production can be instrumental in creating preferences in the ‘average’ voter for this enlarged state role in society¹⁰. Public art can use symbols of ‘fear’ and ‘hope’ in those experiencing public art to create preferences for a larger role 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).

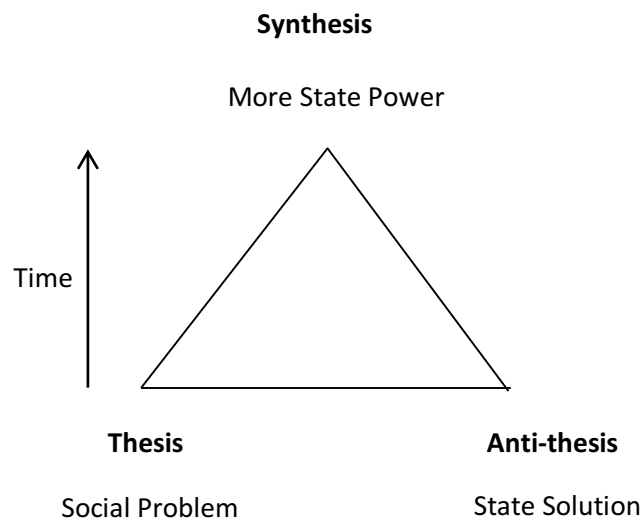


Exhibit 2: Fichte Triangle Illustrating Historical “Progress” and State Power. Author’s diagram.

We use the dialectic (Exhibit 2) to explain how fear and hope might be used in public art to create preferences for a larger role for the state in society. In the first moment public art can encode the image of a social problem (fear, the thesis),

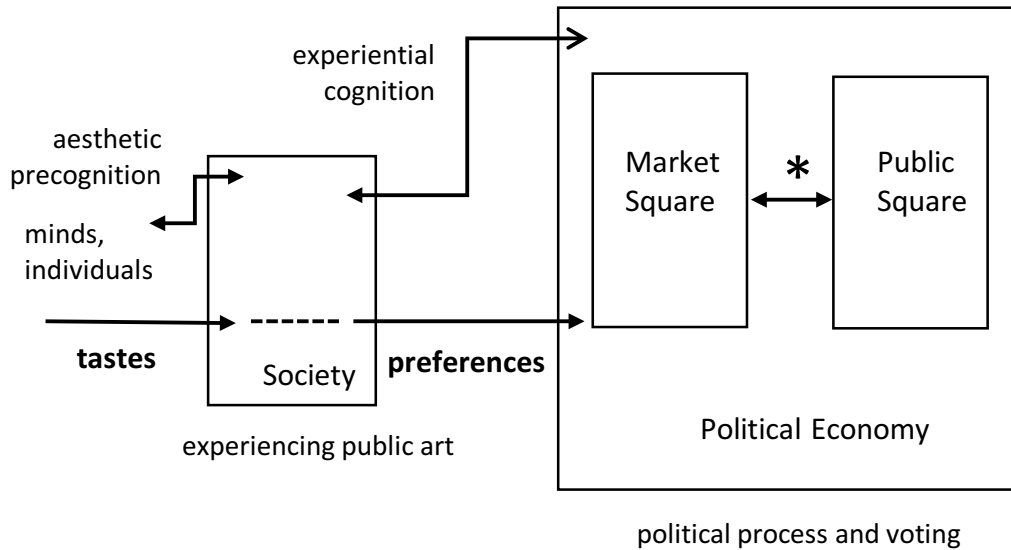
¹⁰ We do not require median voter assumptions for our model as do not use formal equilibrium properties.

while at the same time encoding a state solution to this problem (hope, the antithesis). The individual experiencing these images now decodes the public art instrumentally with a precognitive preference for the state to solve the social problem, this preference is realized in voting behaviour. In the next moment we have the synthesis of the social problem and the hoped-for state solution, realized as more state power over society.¹¹

The aesthetic precognition for more state control in society, realized with image-laden public art, emerges materially in society through the experiential cognition of political economy (see Exhibit 3). Wagner uses a binary structure of mind theory to discuss the relationship between the individual and society. Human nature¹² is a duality between self-interest and socialization (or between man and society). “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” (Wagner 2007, 21). Wagner’s fiscal sociology can account for taste activation towards preference creation, when public art is the instrument for preferences for an enlarged discretionary role for the state in society. We can term this field “art statism”.

¹¹ Boulding (1956) finds that hierarchical divisions-of-labor in civil and political society are an ordering of subjective “role-images”, our heuristic helps to show how these role-images can be constructively-mediated with art-statism. Democratic societies create role-images from the bottom-up, in our case with an enlarged role-image for the state in ‘solving’ social problems. This changing role-image is constructed as voter preference-creation and realized in voting behaviour.

¹² Some may prefer the terminology human “instincts” as opposed to human “nature.”



*Site of mutualism and/or conflict

Exhibit 3: Precognitive Taste Activation and Preference Revelation in Exchange. Diagram by author based on ideas in Wagner (2007), with additions by author.

We follow Kant and Hume and find that all people have innate aesthetic tastes. An individual enters social relations (society), in our case experiencing public art, say for example an art exhibit, a mural or a play, and tastes are then converted into preferences. These preferences are then exercised in the political economy, in our case voting and the democratic process, where the state enlarges its legitimate power, moving along the sociological continuum from an Order to an Organization.¹³ The public art has realized instrumental value for a self-interested state. This process we term art-statism. The feedback loops in our heuristic are also consistent with Jasay on a robust social theory.

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

¹³ The state has increased its ‘monopoly power’ and instead of poly-centric governance we have governance oligopoly (Eusepi and Wagner 2017).

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 (de Jasay 1989, 270, *emphasis in original*).

IV. Not all state art-production is art-statism

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. The state may use public art to *revalidate* its legitimacy as national culture. We define all public art as “national culture” and claim that art-statism is but a subcategory of national culture.

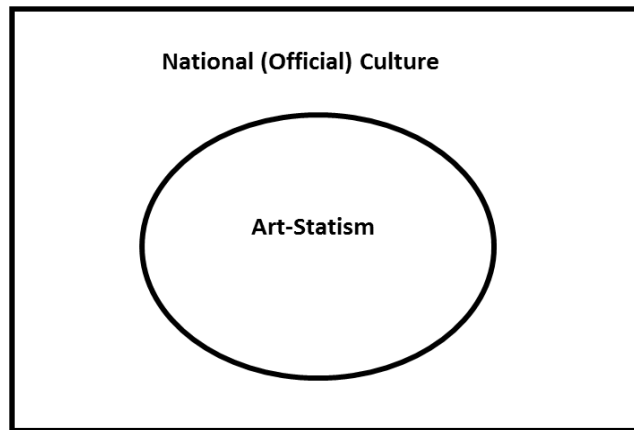


Exhibit 4: Venn Diagram on National Culture and Art Statism. Author’s diagram based on discussion in the text.

Welch (2013, 42) finds “building and sustaining a sense of national identity is an important goal for most states” and describes the birth and development of the state (in the West) as an enlightenment project beginning in the 18th century. “The nation has been defined as an ‘imagined political community’ this sense of imagined community differs from an actual community, because it is not based on

everyday, face-to-face interaction among its members”.¹⁴ We find again that the state needs to build towards its monopoly on coercion.

Creating the sense of nationhood, of belonging, is imperative for any state in order to justify political and economic policies to its citizens – especially when it comes to the collecting of taxes and other unpalatable activities (Welch 2013, 42).

Whether public art is national culture generally or art-statism more specifically may only be in the eye of the beholder. For example, placing the U.S. Constitution in the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC (and making entrance free) is of course a form of national culture but could it also be a form of art-statism? For a classical liberal who prefers the original Articles over the Constitution it may be more specifically the latter, whereas for an American progressive only the former. Art-statism is always nationalism, where state power is salutary *prima facie*. Where we draw the line between national culture and art-statism is when we can find *intent* to use public art to enlarge the scale and scope of the state in society. The case-study archival method allows us to make this analysis specifically for the New Deal period in the United States, a period which many believe institutionalized a much more centralized American federalism.¹⁵

V. Case-studies from the New Deal

In what follows we use the archives to create case-studies of four specific examples of art-statism. The first example is Ben Shahn’s mural for the then new Social Security Building in Washington, DC in 1940^{16,17}. We find public art-production creates images in support of contemporary New Deal programs.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson writes that these relatively new nation-states “imagine themselves antique” (1991, xiv). “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias” (204).

¹⁵ “Government spending in the United States has steadily increased from seven percent of GDP in 1902 to almost 40% today” (Chantrill 2015). For more on the New Deal (1933-1941) as catalyst in changing the nature of American federalism through today see Higgs (2012). See Beito (2000) for evidence of the welfare-state in the USA as crowding-out pre-New Deal mutual aid and Cohen (2008) for a working-class case-study of this process in South Chicago.

¹⁶ Now the headquarters for the Voice of America.

¹⁷ This case-study is from documents with the Stephen Lee Taller Ben Shahn Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. They were sent to the present author by Robert Sennett, Harvard University Library Liaison for the archive, email dtd. May 2, 2013. Used with permission.



Exhibit 5: Ben Shahn's *The Meaning of Social Security* (1940-1941). We can see the fear created by this social realism art.¹⁸ Photo by author (2012).

¹⁸ Social Realism art speaks in a clear voice directly to the popular ear. "By contrast working class people, who expect every image to fulfill a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgments." (Bourdieu 1984, 41). This art sends a 'good' image to the average voter during the New Deal because it offers 'hope' against the 'fear' created.

(COPY) Please return to the Section of Fine Arts. Only copy

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 misfortunes 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, projecting 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

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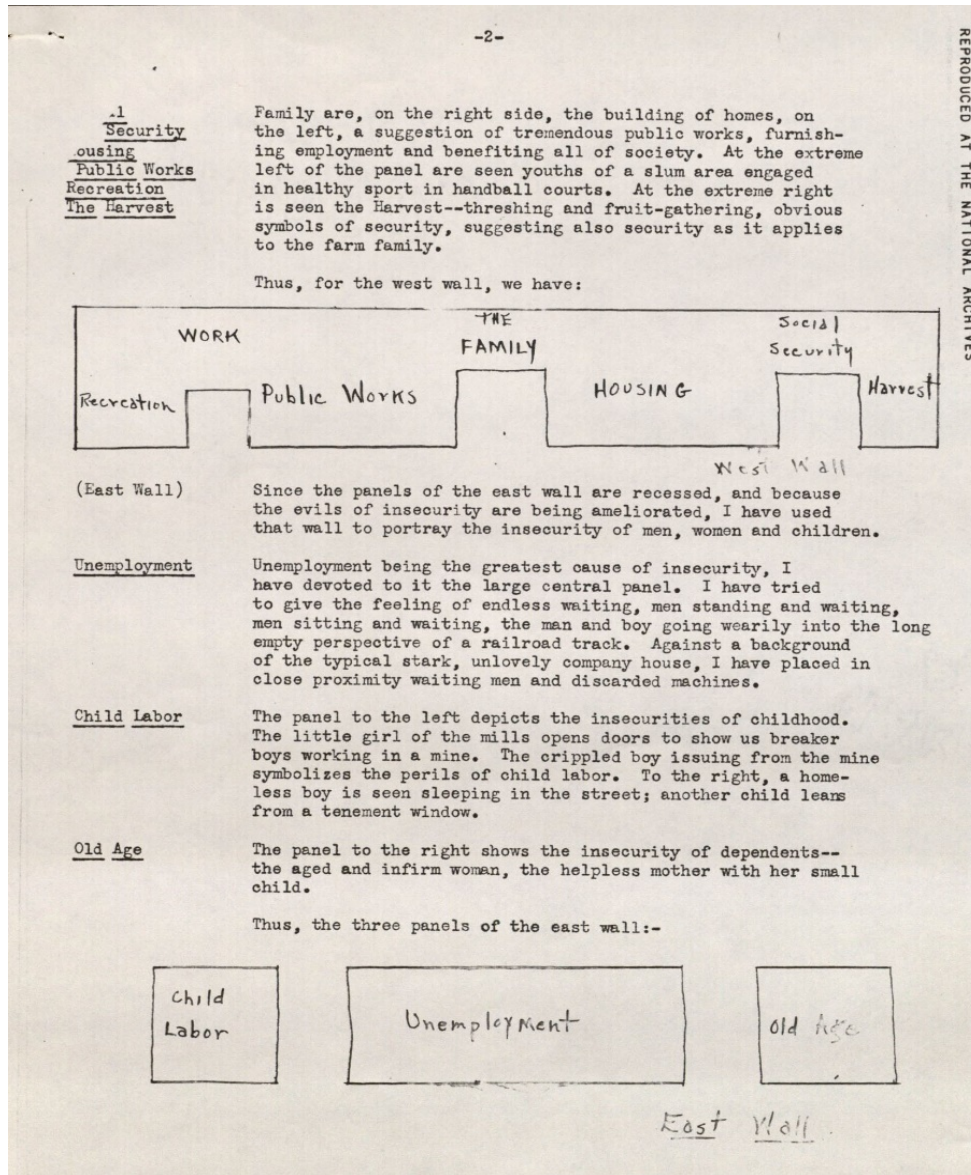


Exhibit 6: Letter from Shahn outlining plan for the mural.¹⁹ We can see the artist's intent to create fear through depicting the *social problems* of "child labor", "unemployment" and "old age". We also find the *state solution* to these social problems which include "the family", "public works", "social security" and "housing". Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Housing Administration and Social Security (old-age pensions) are significant contemporary New Deal initiatives.

¹⁹ Letter dated November 7, 1940 from Shahn to Mr. Edward B. Rowan at the Federal Works Agency, Washington, DC.

Public art must be disseminated to realize its instrumentality. The second case study shows how the presentation of public art, for a Federal Art Project national exhibit in 1936, is changed to encourage an image of experiential self-selection as opposed to a more “command and control” form of public relations, exhibits 7 and 8.²⁰ The perception of self-selection and choice allows more state legitimacy than command-and-control.

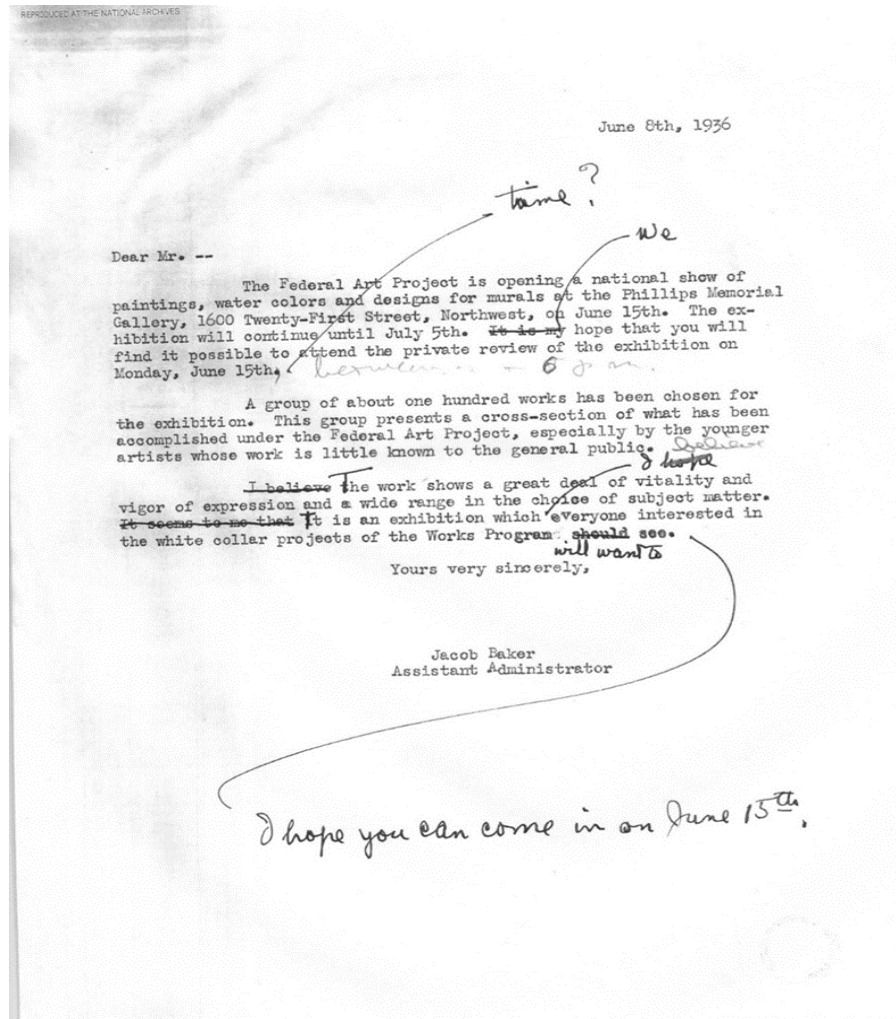


Exhibit 7: We see that the invitation to view public art is being changed to a less demanding rhetorical image.

²⁰ This case is from the US National Archives, Works Progress Administration/ Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) records. Exhibit 7 is a draft form-letter from Jacob Baker, the Assistant Administrator of the FAP, dated June 8, 1936 inviting the recipient to a “national show” in Washington, DC. Exhibit 8 is an updated version one day later, this time from the Director of the FAP, Holger Cahill.

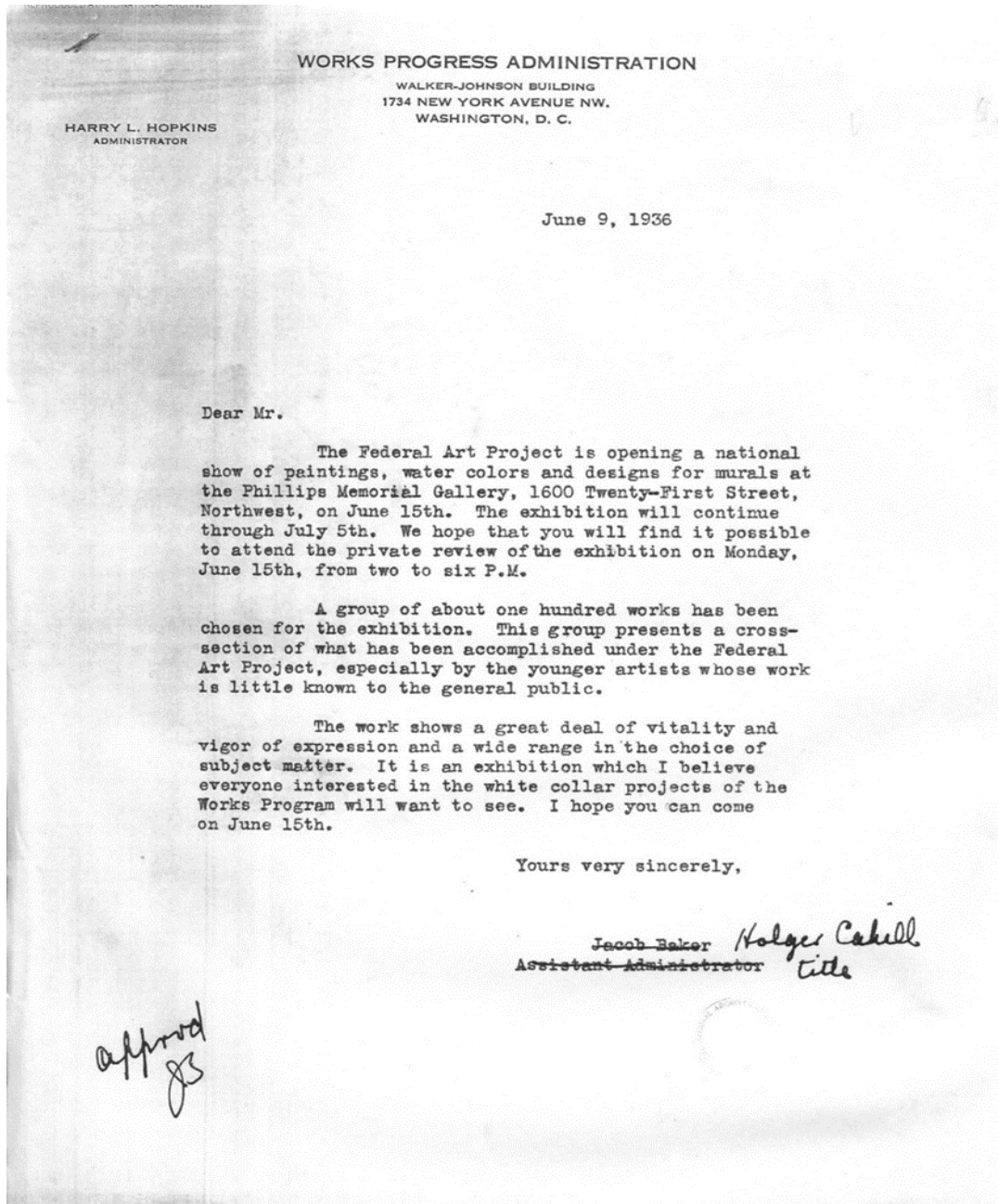


Exhibit 8. The final official invitation letter is now from the Director, instead of the Deputy Director, of the Federal Art Project, with an emphasis on choice. This is an example of art-statism in that we find the rhetorical image changed to encode more legitimacy for the public art.

The last two of our four cases relate to militarism in the USA, leading up to and including World War Two. The third case is from the National Archives and relates to the public art produced by the WPA/FAP in New York City, the single largest source of art production in the New Deal (O'Connor 1973), and shows the intent to use the art project to create war-consciousness during the peacetime national debate over any US role in the war in Europe.

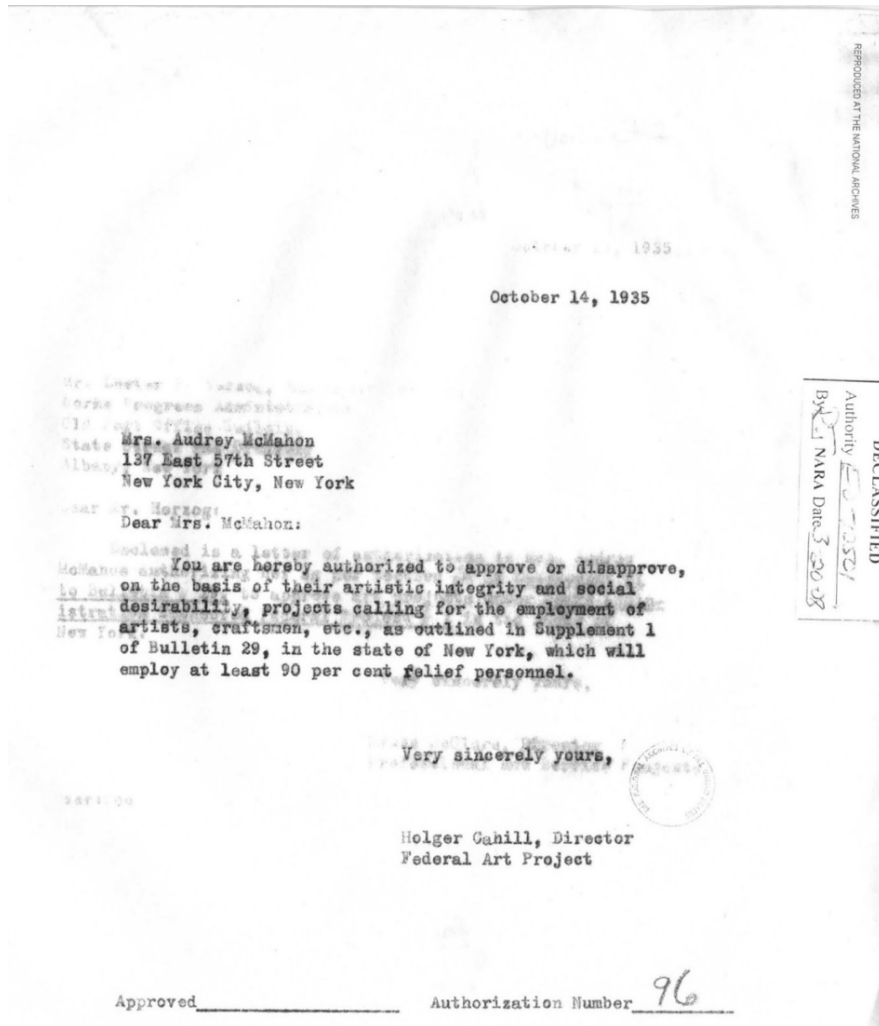


Exhibit 9: October 14, 1935 letter from Holger Cahill, Director of the WPA/FAP, to Audrey McMahon, Director of the WPA/FAP, New York City. McMahon is given authority (the right to discretionary power) to judge potential FAP artists on their “artistic integrity and social desirability.”

Below we analyze the July 1, 1941 progress report of the NYC Federal Art Project and find a prioritization on national defense and the militarization of civil society. This public art production is occurring (at least) six months prior to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7.

SPONSOR'S SEMI-ANNUAL NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT
for the period January 1 - June 30, 1941 July 1, 1941

I. Project Identification

Official Project Name: New York City WPA Art Project
Official Project Number: O.P. 65-1-97-2063
WORK PROJECT NUMBER W.P.: 1

Work Project Starting Date: July 1, 1940 Estimated Completion Date: Sept. 30, 1941

No. of Persons Assigned: Average for Period 890
And End of Period: 573

II. Project Direction

Official Sponsor: The Mayor of the City of New York

Cooperating Sponsors: The Board of Education of the City of New York
The Board of Higher Education of the City of New York
The New York City Department of Hospitals
The New York City Department of Correction
The New York City Department of Public Works
The United States Military Academy
and other co-sponsors for specific undertakings

Sponsor's Representative: Mr. Francis Henry Taylor

Sponsor's Technical Representative: None

WPA Supervisor: Mrs. Audrey McMahon

WPA Technician: Mr. Burgoyne Diller

III. Project History

Date Work Began

1. C. W. A. - December, 1933
2. E. R. B. - April, 1934
3. W. P. A. - August, 1935

IV. Aim and Scope of Project and its Value to the Community

Beyond its immediate objectives of providing work for the unemployed artist and giving him increased confidence and skill, the program of the New York City WPA Art Project is fostering a new art literacy, broadening existing

markets, making art available to the tax-payer and cooperating with government agencies engaged in preparations for national defense. The works of art created by the artists of the Project are allocated to public schools, hospitals, government buildings, parks, playgrounds, housing developments and other tax-supported institutions and lent to tax-exempt public institutions. The work of its service divisions is available to other government agencies. Exhibitions of its artists' work are held throughout the five boroughs of New York City, many in locations which have never before had the opportunity of exhibiting works of art. Art teaching classes are held in public schools, settlement houses, prisons, hospitals and art centers where students of all ages, children from every language group and adults from every walk of life have the opportunity to study almost any one of the branches of the fine and applied arts. Despite the fact that its personnel is drawn from the relief rolls, the Project has been entrusted with the execution of many important murals and sculptures for public buildings, including the New York Public Library, the Queensbridge Housing Project, the New York City Sewage Treatment Plants, the Municipal Airport at LaGuardia Field, Grant's Tomb, U. S. Immigration Service, New York City Department of Hospitals and many others. Services of the Project include also analysis and experimentation with artists materials; the grinding and tubing of oil colors, development of synthetic materials and pigments and of American substitutes for imported material, and for metals, etc., for which defense activities may create a need for conservation. The Project also issues technical brochures and booklets on art techniques for the layman and is engaged in the recording and documentation of an Index of American Design, consisting of accurate rendering in water colors and drawings of articles created by native craftsmen from early Colonial Times to the end of the 19th Century. Posters designed and printed by the Project's poster division have been used by federal, state and city

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departments for campaigns to further health education, fire prevention, civilian morale; to publicize health, recreational and welfare activities and to combat juvenile delinquency.

V. WORK COMPLETED AND PROPOSED

1. Work Completed During the Reporting Period (Jan.-June, 1941) and
2. " " Since the Inception of the Mural Project (July, 1940-June, 1941)

	1	2
	Jan. 1 - June 30, 1941	July 1, 1940 June 30, 1941
Easel Paintings	374	956
Graphic Designs	133	332
Graphic Prints	3224	7531
Man-Hours of Sculptural Architectural Service	2797	4925
Works of Sculpture	150	280
Man-Hours of Mural Architectural Service	7519	14410
Completed Mural Paintings	10	38
Man-Hours of Research of Index of American Design	9030	18831
Completed Index Plates	558	790
Man-Hours of Art Teaching Training	6634	11475
Man-Hours of Art Teaching Research	28550	65226
Teaching Class Meetings	22877	40575
Photographic Prints	21197	37689
Motion Picture Film	-----	2100
Poster Designs	1427	2382
Poster Prints	58347	125021
Exhibition Openings	161	255
Man-Hours of Framing and Display Construction and Service	20714	39023
Man-Hours of Information Writing	3551	8140
Information Items Distributed	40903	178490
Items allocated or loaned	37094	48483
Man-Hours of Technical Service	17936	33299

3. Work Proposed for the next period.

- a) Continuing phases - a continuation of the phases of work listed above.

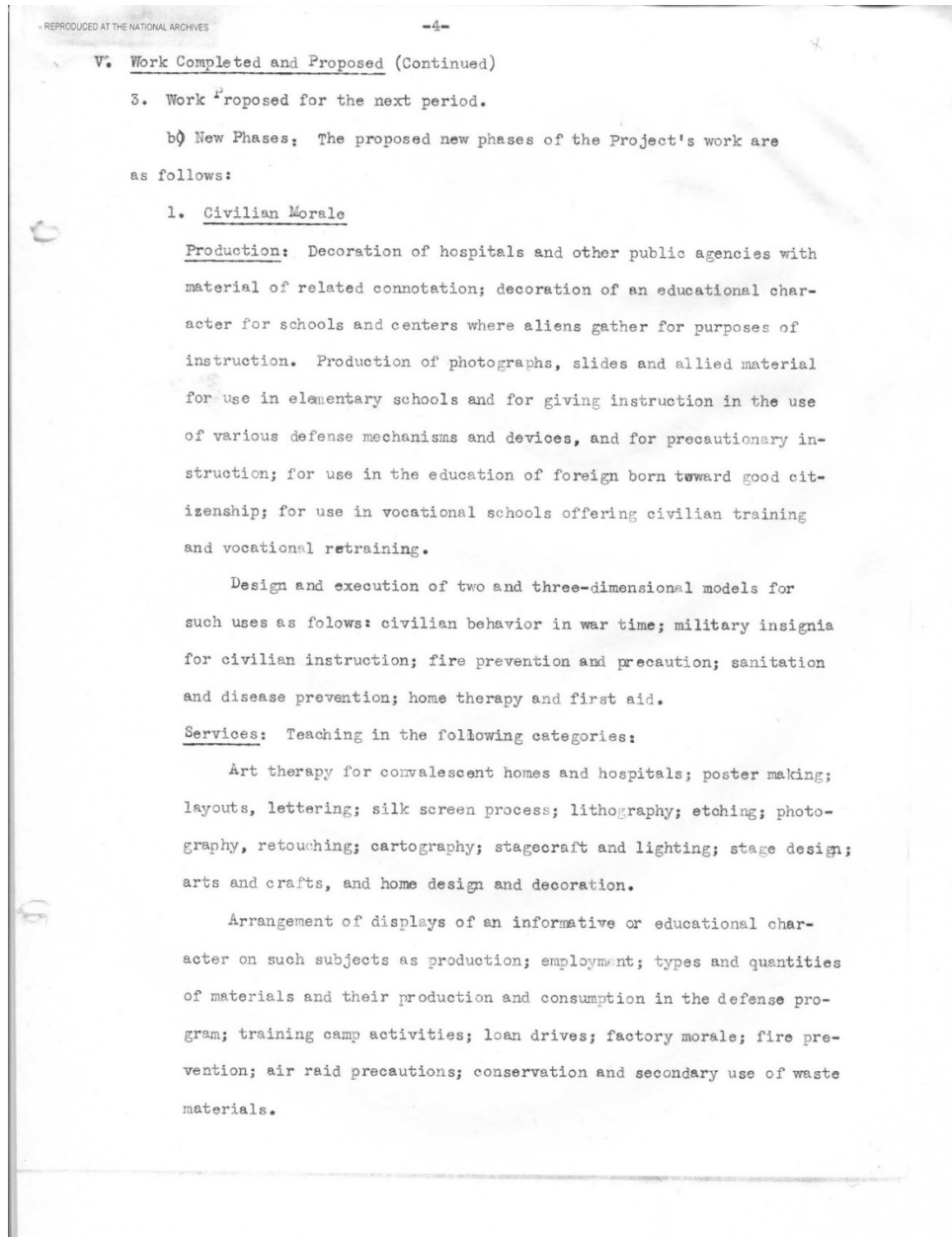


Exhibit 10: First four pages of the New York City WPA Art Project SPONSOR'S SEMI-ANNUAL NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT, dated July 1, 1941.²¹

²¹ Documents from the National Archives. Cahill/McMahon dtd. 10/14/35 from RG-69, FAP General Records, 1935-1940, Box 1. Progress Report dtd. 7/1/41 from RG-69, Records of the Federal Art Project New York, Box 65.

On page 4 of the progress report we find the project's use in art production to create an image of the *obedient citizen-soldier* (Suzik 1999, Russell 2010) as part of a turn towards the militarization of society.²² We are interested in "3. Work Proposed for the next period, b) New Phases: The proposed new phases of the Project's work are as follows: 1. Civilian Morale." We learn that the NYC art project is proposing for the next six-month period,

Design and execution of two and three-dimensional models for such uses as follows: *civilian behavior in war time; military insignia for civilian instruction; fire prevention and precaution; sanitation and disease prevention; home therapy and first aid (emphasis added)*.²³

This public art can be viewed as creating a war-consciousness (the image of a nation at war) during peacetime; the state has more legitimate discretionary power during periods of war. Intentional art-statism towards war is consistent with our heuristic that the state is acting rationally and logically when moving from an Order to an Organization along Wagner's continuum as found in Exhibit 1 concurrent with national emergencies.

Olsen (2013) finds that the Roosevelt Administration has been conducting a 'campaign' against isolationists since July 1939.²⁴ The federally-funded art production in New York City in 1941 as found in the archive may be considered part of this campaign. And we know from Exhibit 9 that the director of the NYC federal art project is authorized to hire those artists who agree (and therefore to not hire those who disagree) with the intent for the images created. We do not know if Director McMahon is in agreement with the proposed images (as have not archival evidence of the final art produced), but we do know that in a continuing succession of government funding and spending proposals it is important for political

²² Schivelbusch 2006 finds there are 'three new deals' creating militarized societies; in the USA, Italy and Germany.

²³ Note that in the paragraph above that quoted here the New York Art Project is proposing "Production of photographs, slides and allied material for use in elementary schools...in the education of foreign born toward good citizenship; for use in vocational schools offering civilian training and vocational retraining." Citizenship training for the "foreign born" was not soon or successful enough as witnessed by the Japanese-American internment camps established by the US Government two months after the Pearl Harbor attack.

²⁴ Today we might call those opposed to foreign wars *non-interventionists* as opposed to *isolationists*.

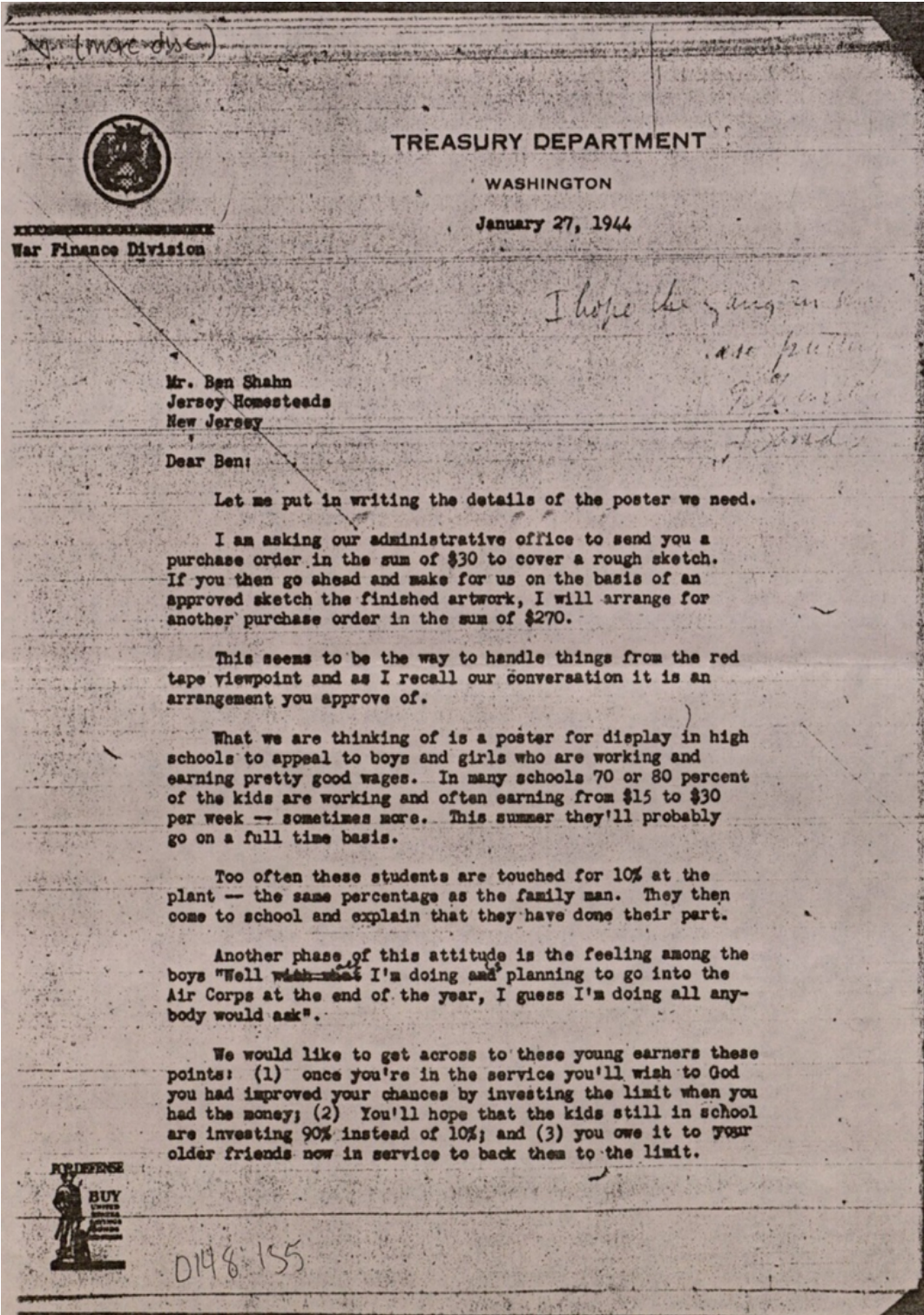
appointees to highlight administrative priorities in order to gain funding for one's projects and therefore continued access to employment, power and prestige (Wildavsky 1984).

The Roosevelt Administration was successful in gaining legislation for the conscription of 900,000 people into the US military *prior* to the USA entering World War Two (Olson 2013), the USA's only peacetime draft. This helps create in historical memory the image that state intervention is needed to prevent unemployment.

Our fourth and last case study on art-statism during the Roosevelt Administration relates to war finance after the USA has entered WWII.²⁵ Ben Shahn is being asked to design a fearsome poster to encourage school-age children living at home to buy war bonds, with the hope that then the war will end sooner and the younger siblings will not have to be drafted like their older brothers, and so that their family members and neighbors will come home from the war sooner than later, and alive. Getting school children to buy bonds means the state can raise taxes less, this ensures more state legitimacy than does tax increases.²⁶ We can see that Shahn is being asked to create an extreme image which might only be considered as legitimate in a democracy during times of war.

²⁵ This case is from the Shahn archives at Harvard University. Exhibit 11 is a January 27, 1944 letter to Shahn from Daniel Melcher, Acting Director of the Education Section, in the War Finance Division of the U.S. Treasury Department. Melcher is requesting Shahn's help in creating a poster which typifies, and extends, the art-statism as illustrated so far. An archival search for the final poster itself, and any further correspondence related to its production, has thus far proved unsuccessful.

²⁶ See Beito 1989 for a history of the tax revolts during the New Deal. Today of course war finance is business-as-usual with permanent and increasing deficits and overt monetization of some of this debt.



(more disc)



TREASURY DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON

January 27, 1944

War Finance Division

*I hope the young in the
are getting
the
fund*

Mr. Ben Shahn
Jersey Homesteads
New Jersey

Dear Ben:

Let me 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 with 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.



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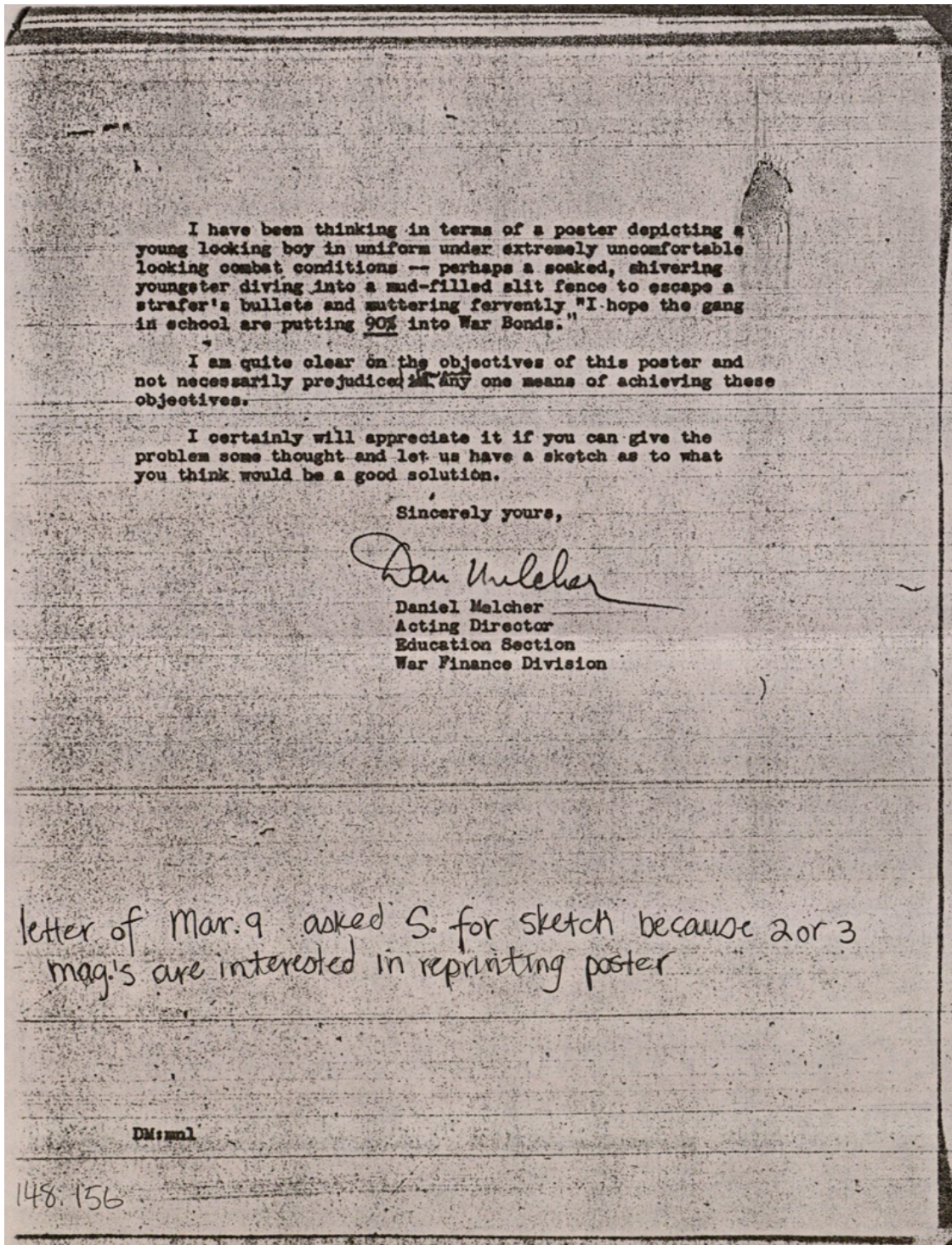


Exhibit 11: Fear-inducing art-statism in time of war. See the image to be created on the top of the second page, "I have been thinking in terms of a poster depicting a young-looking boy in uniform under extremely uncomfortable looking combat conditions – perhaps a soaked, shivering youngster diving into a mud-filled slit fence to escape a strafers bullets and muttering fervently 'I hope the gang in school are putting 90% into War Bonds'".

VI. Conclusion

In this paper we build a model of *art statism*, where a self-interested state can use publicly-funded art to create preferences in the those experiencing this art for a larger, more discretionary, role for the state in society. Given the non-logical rationality of individual political decision-making, art is an ideal instrument for manufacturing political consent through signaling ‘good’ images about the state’s (enlarged) role in society. Socially-formed preferences through art-statism are then acted-upon in the voting process resulting in more state coercion in society. We use the case-study method and find public art produced when the Roosevelt Administration is advocating the creation of programs laying the foundation of the modern welfare-warfare state, a scope and magnitude of federal government intervention into people’s lives unprecedented until this time. Relatedly we also find that art-statism during wartime may push the bounds of a legitimacy required under peacetime in a democracy.

To say that *some* public art is art-statism is not to 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.

Only when archival research finds a pre-meditated *intent* at growing legitimate state power can we conclude that public art is art-statism. More research is required to make a general determination as to the demand-side effects of art-statism. We can evaluate the supply-side intent of public art, but it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain specific effects of experiencing public art on voter-preference. However, for the specific case of the New Deal we believe, following Smith (2006), that the public art created during the period, as well as the massive federal public works creating during the period, have helped to create in historical memory images of a justified larger role for the federal state in American society.

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