

FALL SEMESTER 2009

■ ARHS 525: New Deal Art and Photography

Elizabeth Avery

Thursdays, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The last Great Depression in the United States prompted significant changes in the country's political structure, social relations and cultural institutions. Roosevelt's recovery efforts included major support for art and photography, and this unprecedented government funding raises fascinating questions: What roles did art and photography play in addressing social problems of the time and/or justifying New Deal programs? To what extent did the government control artistic and photographic output? To what extent were policies implemented in practice? How was a national art defined? To what extent did government programs create new audiences for art? We will begin our course by examining what was at stake in Roosevelt's response to the crisis of the Depression and why the arts were included. We will analyze the language used to justify government support of the arts and study theoretical frameworks for thinking about the role of art/artists and photography/ photographers in society. We will also examine the role of the museum and explore other sites of display like post offices and public buildings, world's fairs, and photographic books. The majority of the course will consist of methodological case studies of foundational and more recent scholarship of New Deal art and photography. Readings will include studies of New Deal art by Karal Ann Marling, Jonathan Harris, and Anthony W. Lee, and studies of documentary photography by William Stott, Alan Trachtenberg, Maren Stange and John Tagg.

This course fulfills the Modern/American or American Art requirement.

This course fulfills the Western/European course requirement for those starting in the fall of 2009 and beyond.

Background Reading:

Stephen Baskerville and Ralph Willett, eds. *Nothing Else to Fear: New Perspectives on America in the Thirties.*

Documenting America, 1935-1943, edited by Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan; essays by Lawrence W. Levine and Alan Trachtenberg.