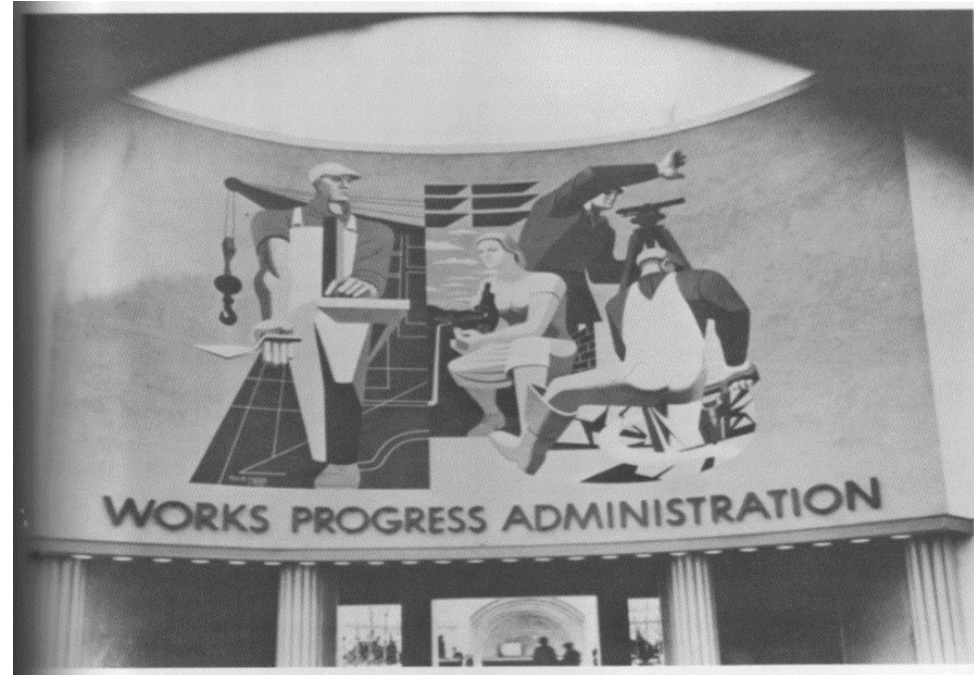


*A theory of art with instrumental value to the state,
and applied case studies from the New Deal art production in the USA*



DRAFT
Cameron M Weber

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).

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

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

Here we build a model describing how art can realize instrumental value for a self-interested state.

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

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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.

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

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

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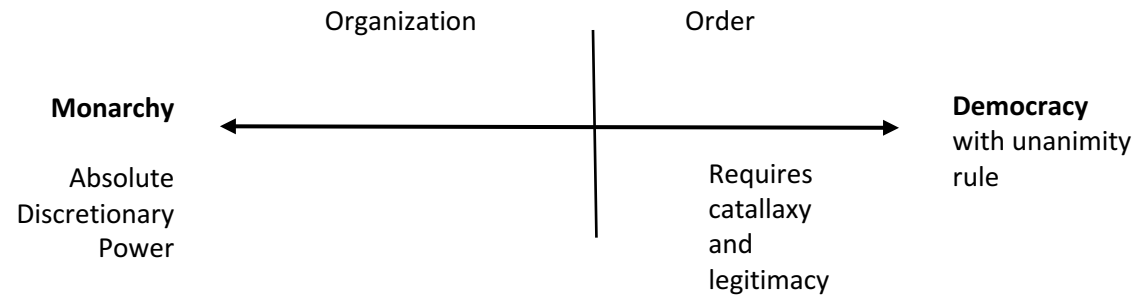
Further, Anthony de Jasay 1998 *The State* finds that the state has self-interest, where he “consider(s) the state as a live institution which behaves as if it has a will of its own and a single hierarchy of ends....”

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.

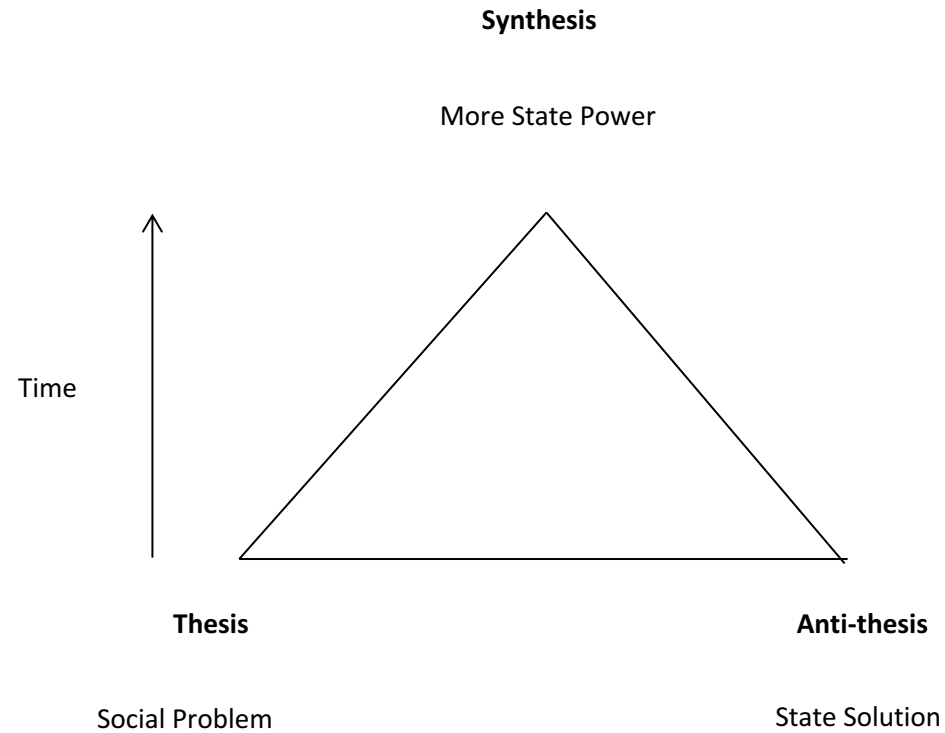


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State art production can use ‘fear’ and ‘hope’ in those experiencing public art to create preferences for a larger for the state in society.

“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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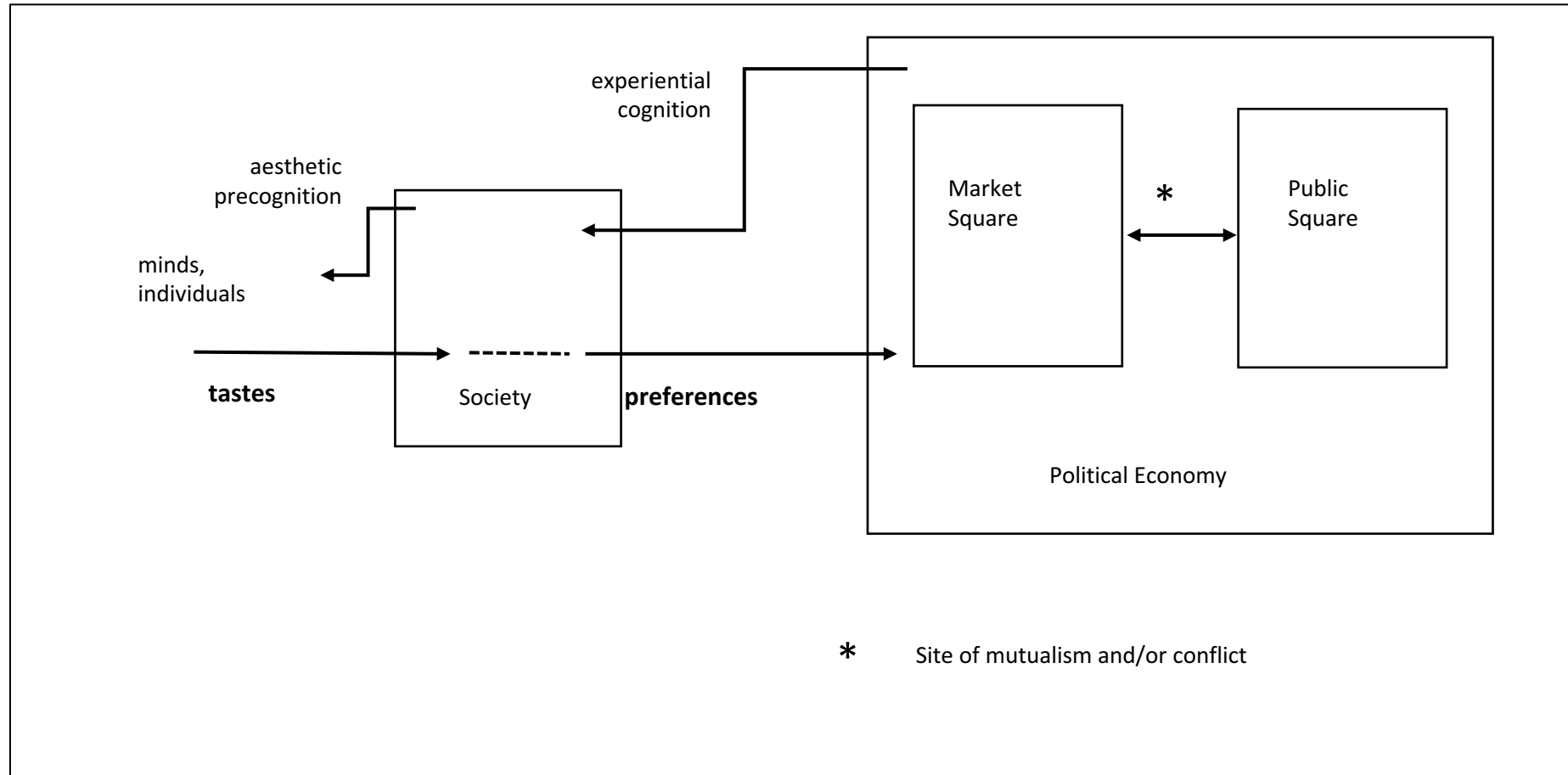


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Wagner 2007 uses binary structure of mind theory,

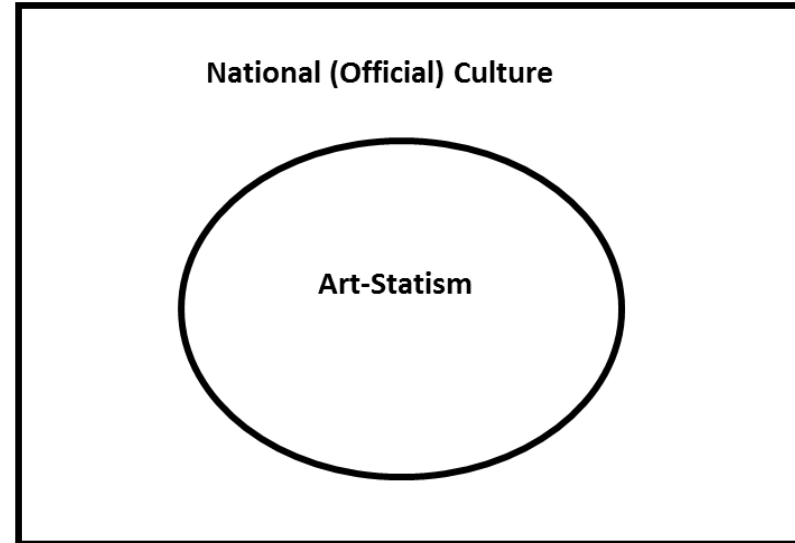
“I work with a bi-directional relationship between mind and society. From one direction, the interaction among minds generates and transforms societal formations; from the other direction, those formations channel and shape both the ends people choose to pursue and the means they employ in doing so”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

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state



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.



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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

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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

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REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

June 8th, 1936

time?

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. ~~We~~ hope that you will find it possible to attend the private review of the exhibition on Monday, June 15th, ~~between 2 and 6 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~~ 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

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.

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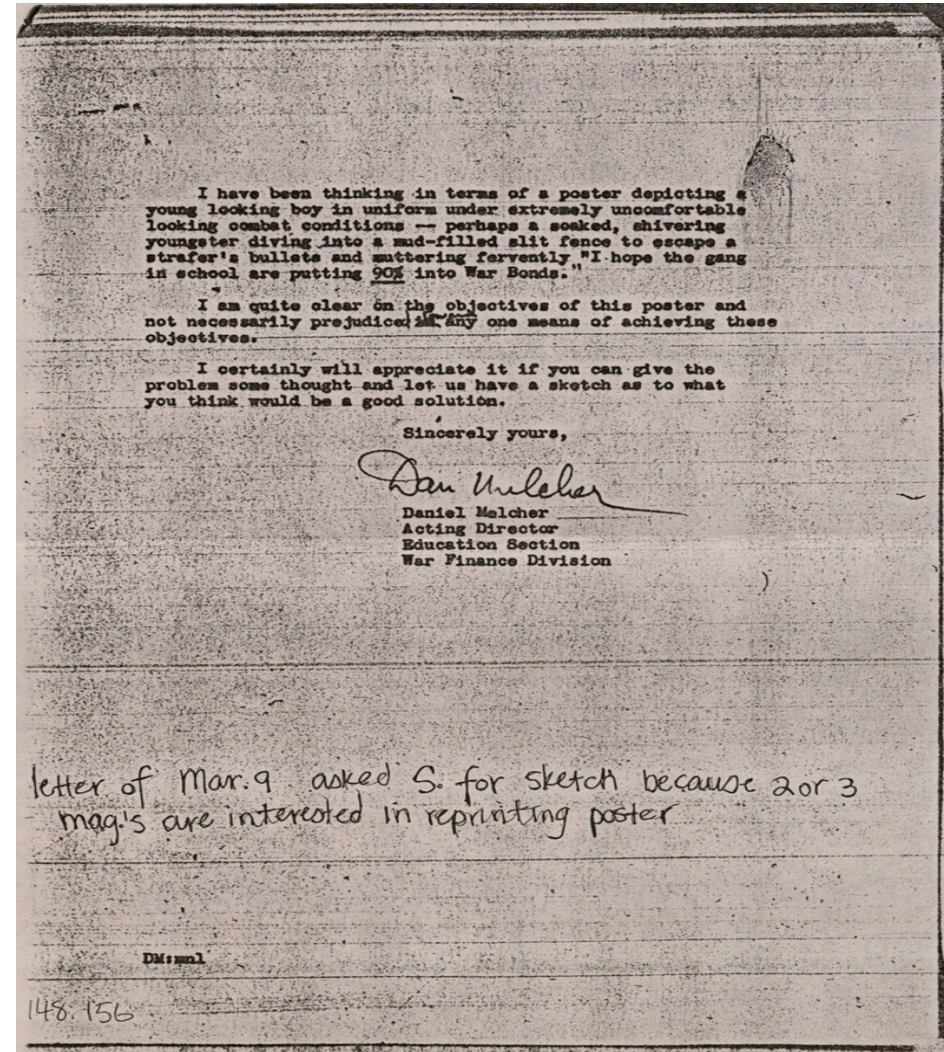
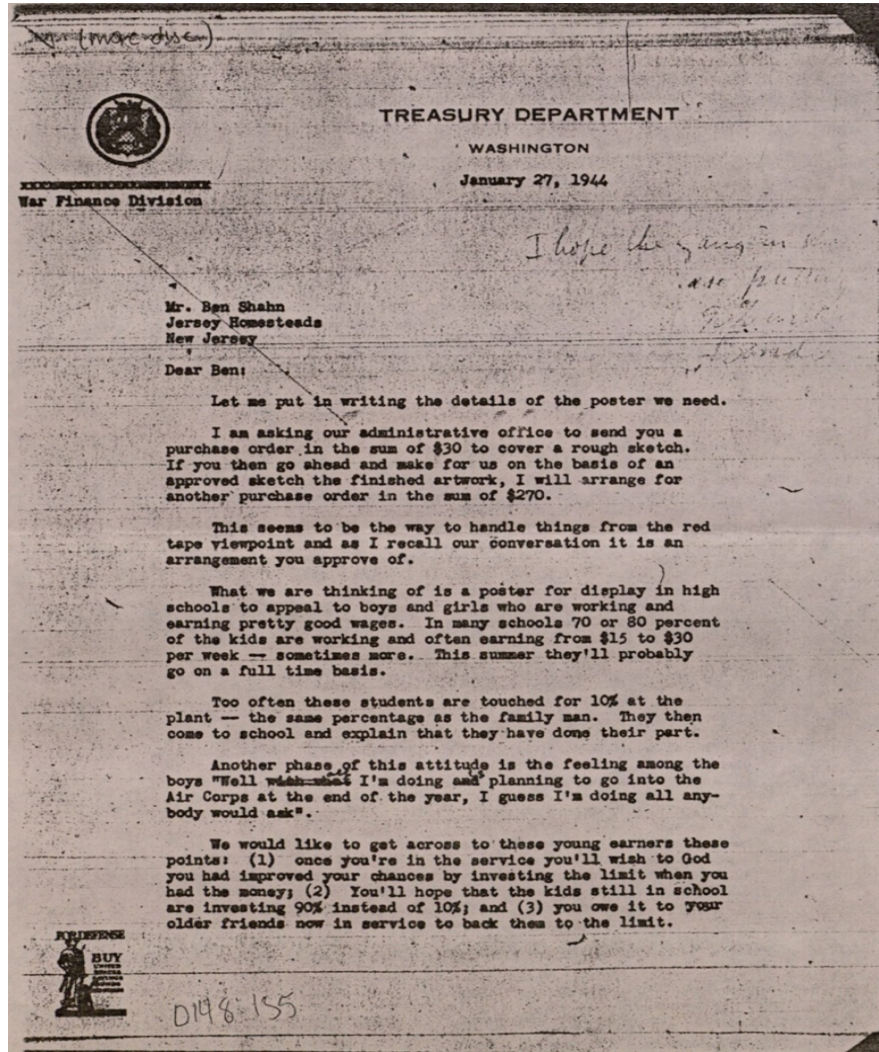
The work shows a great deal of vitality and vigor of expression and a wide range in the choice of subject matter. It is an exhibition which I believe everyone interested in the white collar projects of the Works Program will want to see. I hope you can come on June 15th.

Yours very sincerely,

Jacob Baker *Holger Cahill*
Assistant Administrator *title*

Approved JS

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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*).

A theory of art with instrumental value to the state

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.