

The great depression brought changes to art in many ways assignment

[History](#)



Sean Rayl American Art History The Great Depression brought changes to art in many ways. America finally had the war behind it. The country was booming and the majority had a carefree attitude. People were accustomed to their lives and were not prepared for what was about to happen in 1929. The new decade would be a time of great change for everyone ??? art included. The 1920's would bring a rollercoaster of events to America. Times had changed, the war was over and new technologies were starting to emerge causing people to change their lifestyles. Many people had moved from the farms into the big cities so they could help with the war effort.

Millions of immigrants flourished to America. This would mark a new era in American history known as "The Roaring 20's" and the beginning of modern day America. Life in America was more open and out going than normal. Jazz clubs opened up at mostly every block, where young vibrant people would go drink and dance the night away. This kind of social activity was looked down upon by older citizens that thought this kind of behavior was inappropriate. This would ultimately lead up to prohibition and the first time ever in American history an amendment was excused making alcohol illegal in the United States.

This caused crime rates to skyrocket within American cities causing some of the most notorious gangsters in American history to emerge, such as Al Capone. So many other things came out of the roaring 20's, such as inventions of the automobile, radio and airplanes, new fashion styles, skyscrapers and movies. With life changing, so did art. Mostly throughout the 1920's there were a variety of art movements and styles that were popular.

Such as surrealism, Art Deco, regionalism and with new technologies came photography and also film.

In 1929 the stock market crashed causing many people jobs and their life savings. Banks were continuing to fail and jobless workers would rely on crime and theft to support their families. With the stock market crash and many people in debt, this paved the way for many artists to express their feelings, through painting, architecture [pic]and photography. One of the most popular art movements during this time was known as American Scene painting. This art movement rejected the earlier European Modernist and abstract styles. It primarily depicted realistic scenes of American life.

One of the famous American scene painters was Charles Sheeler and was known as a Precisionist painter. His paintings mainly consisted of simplified forms of American factories and buildings and used crisped defined edges with smooth brushwork throughout his paintings. Above is his famous work titled simply " American Landscape, 1930". Another popular form of art was art Deco, which was mostly found in American architecture, jewelry, furniture, clothes and handcrafts through out the 1920's. It's geometrical design with parallel lines kept the sleekness style throughout the 1920's.

Surrealism was originally formed in Europe and with art students from America they had brought the style over to the United States. Some of the most popular surrealist was Alexander Calder and Joseph Cornell. Calder was a sculptor and an engineer who was inspired by surrealist painters in Europe to sculpt and create moveable pieces of art. One of his famous works was " Lobster Trap and Fish Tail". All of the parts moved, not mechanically, but

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with the wind. People think he was an abstract artist, but he wanted to stimulate the imagination. Regionalism was another art movement that was influenced by the American Scene painting.

Grant Wood was a regionalist painter who focused on the everyday living in America. His "American Gothic" is a realistic painting of what appears to be a husband and wife in front of their farm house. But it is actually supposed to be an older Iowa farmer and his daughter. The Regionalist movement is divided into two groups. One is the social realist and was influenced by the social troubles of the lower class. The other was the Regionalist and they were more focused on the positive side of things (such as Grant Wood), hoping to drive America out of the depression.

A Regionalist painter named Thomas Hart Benton, painted his "Instruments of Power from the mural America today." Which shows a mural of all sorts of technological improvements during this time period. It consists of a train, plain, electric towers, steam engines and other symbols of industry. The social realists were primarily focused on the American worker and sought to change the hard economic times of the Great Depression. In fact, most of the social realists rejected idealism and focused their attention on how the artists saw the subjects and depicted how they felt about the subject.

Social realist style was associated with hard-edged muscular figures that are distorted and morphed. The movement's main goal was to show struggles of the working America. The leading social realist during this time was Aaron Douglas, who was also the leading artist for the Harlem Renaissance.

During World War I, millions of African Americans moved to the north to look

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for jobs. In the south there was not much opportunity at all for African Americans. This would be later called the Great Migration. This would cause great racial tension in the north.

In Harlem, eager to share their social thoughts with the rest of the world, African Americans would then explore their new surroundings and experiment with music, writing and art that revolutionize the Harlem Renaissance. Aaron Douglas would be the forefront of the Harlem Renaissance. He would produce great works, such as " Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction. " This piece was meant for African Americans to realize they are part of this world and this country. The painting is a reenactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, which suggests that Douglas was trying to reinforce their part in history.

Douglas's style was highly influenced abstract style. He would use a limited color palette in his paintings using a variety of light and dark contrasts within his works. In contrast to Aaron Douglas, a young Jacob Lawrence would appear, painting a series called " The Migration of the Negro". It was a series of 6 panels that showed African Americans traveling on a train station. He used an abstract style and simple shapes that fits the forms of Cubism and African American folk art. In March 1933, newly elected president Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested a plan to revitalize the American economy.

The plan was called the new deal and was simply a promise to the American people that this new plan would get America out of the economic depression. Many organizations came out of this new deal plan. For starving artist, this gave them a prime opportunity to make money and also to show their works

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of art. The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was an organization that was going to give artist work. The PWAP did not last long but it gave artists a reviving boost. Then in 1935 a much similar organization established called the Federal Art Project (FAP) employed over 5, 000 artists from 1935 to 1943.

Artists such as Michael Lensin would benefit from this organization. His mural " Mining" gives a true understanding of the American worker. Much of the FAP art were murals, sculptures and frescos that still exist throughout the country. Most of the subject matter in these works of art was mainly about American struggle and American prosperity and achievements. These organizations would not just produce painters, but would also produce great photographers that would capture real live images of people. This new technology would then revolutionize photography and will inspire future photographers throughout history.

Photography was the most popular forms of art during the Great Depression. With new technology for cameras it was easy for photographers to capture images everywhere they went. The photographs captured real people with real struggles. It also captured the harsh reality of the Great Depression. Many photographers would go a different course and try to promote more positive images such as young people dancing and having a good time. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) would hire these photographers to capture certain images to promote positive life.

The Great Depression was a time period when people needed to see the harsh realities of the Depression and how it effect people, especially the

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lower class citizens. A photographer such as Walker Evans was known as one of the masters of photography. He took pictures of many people during the Great Depression and showed the grueling struggles of Americans. Walker's use of lighting, composition and capturing great detail was what made him a pioneer in the photography world. His photos of sharecroppers and immigrants during the Depression show the harsh realities of their situation.

He was hired by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to take a series of photographs of families living in run down homes. A photo taken in 1936 shows a family living in poor and dirty conditions posing in front of the camera. They all look run down and defeated. He placed them directly into the center of photograph making sure that they were the focal point of this picture. You can see throughout the picture just how terrible these living conditions were. He would then carry out more series of photographs of the lower class during the Great Depression.

There was a Federal agency called the Farm Security Administration that promoted imagery of the Depression to show viewers the impact of the struggling economy. The Farm Security Administration was aware of how photographs impacted public thought. There are Pictures such as " Young Girls Knitting Stockings in Southern Hosiery Mill" by Lewis W. Hine, which shows girls in a factory working in a harsh atmosphere. This was an earlier photo taken during World War I. He would then focus more on the progress of America. He took an extraordinary photo called " Rivetting on the dome, a quarter mile up".

It was a photo taken of workers during the construction of the Empire State building. Some photographers took pictures of the positive, many photographers were more curious about the struggles during the Great Depression. One photographer in particular was Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother". This photograph would then be known as the face of The Great Depression. Lange had done a series of photographs in 1936 on a family living on a campsite in California for agricultural workers living around the Los Angeles area. Lange was currently on a project for the FSA when she saw this Mother with 7 children living in a tent.

The mother looked tired, hungry and was on the brink of giving up. "I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was 32. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food.

There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it." (Lange, Dorothea) Lange captured a true moment of hardship and suffering, but at the same time she captured the Mother's strength as well. Pictures like this were common for the FSA because showing a mother with children will always show emotions; it also

shows the survival instincts of Migrant Mother. Through out the 1920's and late 1930's it was a true up and down rollercoaster of life in America.

New technologies, inventions and art movements have changed America forever. From the American Scene painting artists to the realistic imagery of photography came a drastic change in how we look at art. America survived the toughest economic downfall in history. With that came unique art that represents that period. Sources 1. " Migrant Mother, 1936," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005). Article. ??? This article is a good source. It has a history of Dorothea Lange and her career and has a really description of the photograph " Migrant Mother". 2. Smiley, Gene. " Great Depression".

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of the Great Depression. It discusses the hard economic times in the United States and also the world. 3. Damon, Duane . Headin' for better times: The arts of the Great Depression. Lerner Publications, February 2002. ??? This is a book that focuses on the arts during the Great Depression. I ordered online pretty cheap. It will be a good reference. 4. Kangas, Steve. " Timelines of the Great Depression ". July 17, 2010. ??? This is a nice timeline from 1920's through 1945.

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