

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Artists of the WPA

April 16 – June 27, 2015

New York, NY- Bill Hodges Gallery is pleased to announce its fifth exhibition, *Artists of the WPA*, at its new Chelsea location. The show will be on view from April 16th to June 6th and will feature a selection of preeminent artists—Jacob Lawrence, Charles Alston, Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Charles Sebree, and more—who contributed artistically and socially to alleviate our nation from the toils of The Great Depression under the Works Progress Administration, or WPA.

The WPA was enacted by Franklin D. Roosevelt as an ambitious attempt to boost national economy and morale. Out of work laymen were employed to build schools, libraries, and community centers, and more than 5,000 artists were commissioned by the WPA to create celebratory paintings and murals to adorn these new institutions.

The intent of *Artists of the WPA* is not to provide a historic look at the artworks created through the WPA; many works in the show were created much later. Rather, its curation showcases the artists who led and participated in the administration and its impact on their artistry.



Milton Avery
Study for The Nursemaid, ca. 1934
Gouache with Traces of Pencil on Paper
22 ¼ x 15 ¼ in.

Through high contrast shadows, sinister faces appear in **Jacob Lawrence's** 1953 painting, *After the Show*. While in the WPA, Lawrence painted in the Easel Division; this tempera painting demonstrates Lawrence's command in achieving depth and form through flatness. Monochromatic blue in conjunction with geometric simplicity allow detail, such as the folds in the table cloth and ornate filigree in the dining chairs, to surface through the space he's carved out.

Sculpture was also a medium used by WPA's artists. **Elizabeth Catlett** was employed by the WPA but left the program due to conflicts. Standing at less than 12 inches, Catlett's bronze sculpture *Rebozo*, emits a confident aura. The girth of the figure's limbs and impenetrable clasp of its fists give the sense of strength that the WPA sought to evoke.

Milton Avery and **Charles Sebree** worked in the Easel Division depicting scenes of American life. Avery's *Study for The Nursemaid* (pictured) shows a nursemaid rendered simplistically with brown limbs peeking out of a loosely formed white dress. It plainly illustrates the societal expectations in America circa 1934. *Mystic*, Sebree's 1939 oil on masonite, possibly depicts a traveler or gypsy, given the title and the figure's exotic attire. The thin layers of paint applied and partially scraped away reveal of process of time and give rise to a rustic impression.

In the WPA's Federal Art Project division, **Romare Bearden** was tasked with portraying African American culture of the South. His 1979 monoprint, *Introduction for a Blues Queen*, uses bold, energetic strokes with washes of grey, blue, and yellow to generate a transcendent, almost fantastical, landscape embodied by the South's birth-child—jazz. Like the aforementioned artworks, figurative forms are evident in Lawrence's monoprint, however, they're heavily abstracted.

The WPA held a preference for figurative art. In spite of this prevailing attitude, many artists like Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis made a push towards abstraction after the WPA's dissolution in 1943. **Norman Lewis'** untitled 1945 oil on canvas epitomizes this expansion. Lewis's presence is felt through the sense of movement that arises from thick black strokes that swerve, intersect, and tangle in the middle of the composition, trapping the underlying red and blue hues in a grid full of irregular complex shapes.

The Bill Hodges Gallery is located on the 2nd floor of 529 W. 20th Street between 10th Avenue and 11th Avenue. Our closest subways stations are at 14th St. & 8th Ave. (A-C-E-L) and 23rd St. & 8th Ave. (C-E). Gallery Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10am – 6pm and Saturday 12:30pm – 5:30pm. Press viewings can be arranged. For more information or to arrange a viewing, please contact Bill or Navindren Hodges at (212) 333-2640 or via email at info@billhodgesgallery.com.

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