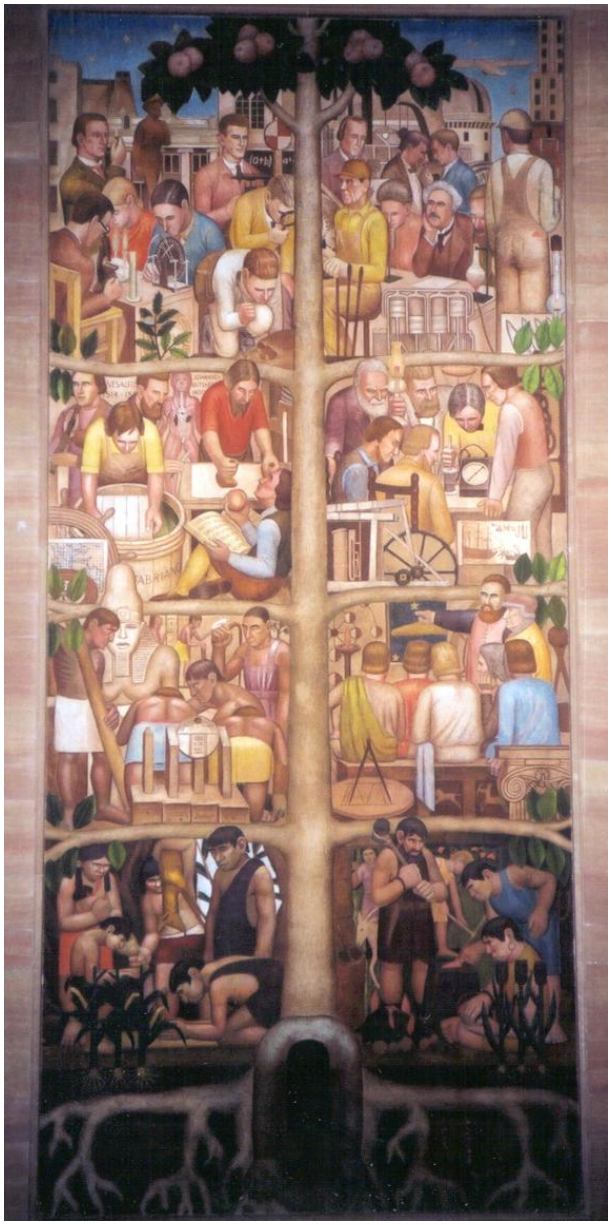
Labor Arts Forum Tours the WPA Art at the University of Oregon

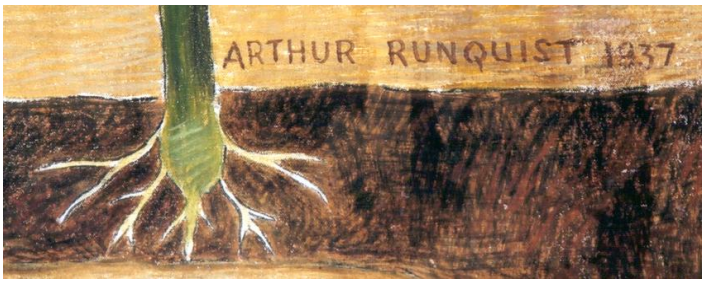


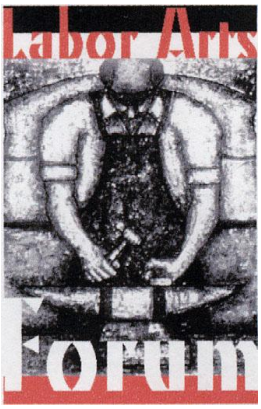
Arthur Runquist's 1937 *Development of the Sciences* is on the west stairwell of the University of Oregon Library. His signature for its companion piece—in the building's east stairwell—is at the right.

Margaret Bullock, Associate Curator of American Art at the Portland Art Museum, a member of the Steering Committee of Labor Arts Forum, led an informative tour of art from the Roosevelt era Works Progress Administration on Friday, May 12, 2004. It was the well-attended opening event of the 36th annual Pacific Northwest Labor History Conference staged on the University of Oregon campus.

Some 35-40 people from across the region joined the tour, the furthest coming from Alberta. After convening at the U of O Law School, we proceeded directly to the University Library, where the greatest collection of 1930s WPA artwork remains on display. Built in its entirety as a WPA project, artwork in the edifice was designed and installed during its 1935-'37 construction. Pictured above, missal writing carved in stone over the main library's east entrance, "Ye Shall Know the Truth," with its rejoinder, on the west entrance, "And the Truth Shall Make You Free." Project artist M.B. Zane executed both works.

Such lofty sentiments and explorations recur frequently in dozens of artworks in a wide range of disciplines and mediums at the school. Despite the staggering impact of the deeply entrenched Depression, these Westerners retained their optimism and sense of operating in the grand tradition of classical art, though evidence of American style and craft emerges in many of the works.





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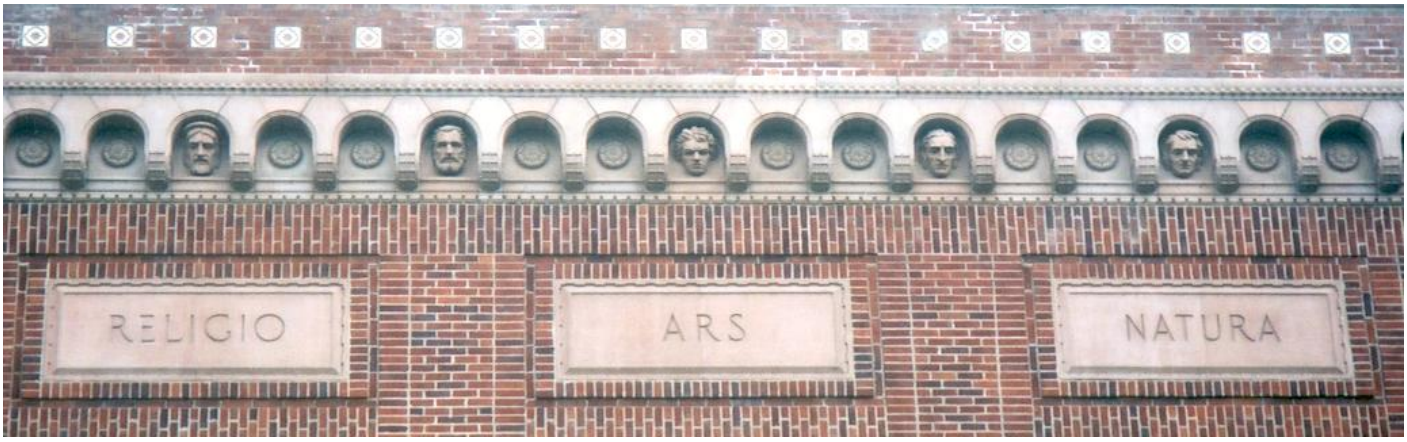
These campus works provided an early opportunity for WPA artists and artisans to employ their skills, resulting in lasting work, most still in remarkably good condition. Though the bulk of the artwork on the University campus is integral to the library building, individual works can be found scattered about the campus.

Craftsman O.B. Dawson of Portland has metal work in several locales, at times exquisite in its detail (wrought iron tree at right, bronze inner door, page 3) and elsewhere bold in its scale (wrought iron “Dad’s Gates” above, top right). His work and that of several others seen at U of O would soon grace buildings in several Oregon locations, most notably at Timberline Lodge, the largest WPA project in the state and certainly the best known. Nonetheless, the variety and quality of the work commissioned for the University makes it the second largest collection of the Federal One project, a must-see for anyone interested in the art of the Roosevelt era.

Above: University of Oregon Seal on "Dad's Gates" by WPA artisan O.B. Dawson. *Mens Agitat Molem* – Mind Rules Matter, the school's motto, was selected by Judge Matthew Deady the University's first Board Chairman.

Below: Detail of exterior doors by O.B. Dawson



Cast stone portrait heads of key figures of world culture are located across the cornice of the main library. They include: Buddha, Christ, Michelangelo, Beethoven, DaVinci, Nerwton and Shakespeare.

Labor Arts Forum – Upcoming Events

A project of the non-profit Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission, Labor Arts Forum was created in 2003 to "cultivate the broad understanding of the arts and times in Oregon during the Roosevelt era – 1933-1945." This tour, by special arrangement with PNLHC, was the first event of an exciting series of exhibits, tours, publications and our initial symposium during the next 18 months. Please plan to participate in the following:

Symposium: *The Roosevelt Era (1933-1945): Arts and Times in Oregon*
Saturday, October 9, 2004, Portland Art Museum – admission $25 – visit www.ochcom.org for details in July

Exhibits – Working Titles – Other Exhibits are in the Works:

Two Photographers of the WWII Shipyards	August-October, 2004	Portland Art Museum
Art of the Working People of Oregon	September, 2004	ArtSpace Gallery – Bay City
Early Contemporary Crafts History and the WPA	September-October, 2004	Contemporary Crafts Gallery
Photos & Artifacts of the Kaiser WWII Shipyards	December, 2004	Multnomah Central Library – Collins
Charles E. Heaney: Memory, Imagination and Place	January-March, 2005	Hallie Ford Museum – Willamette/Salem
Currents & Confluence: The Museum Art School and the Federal Art Projects	July-August, 2005	Pacific Northwest College of Art

Book Release: Co-published with OSU Press — October, 2004
Waging War on the Home Front: an Illustrated Memoir of World War II, Chauncey Del French – working in the WWII Vancouver Shipyards

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