

Cultivating Citizens: The Regional Work of Art in the New Deal Era

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Decline began immediately. The original Newton line proved unprofitable and was abandoned. The “automobile craze” was in full swing by 1907, and competition from cars, trucks, and buses cut into profits (43). Government-funded road-building projects and injurious regulations pushed the FDDM&S to take dire measures, including operating its own bus service. The Great Depression thrust it back into receivership as its bonds fell from \$24 in 1930 to 25¢ in 1932 (89). World War II papered over the cracks. The FDDM&S turned a profit in 1944 and 1945, but by 1955 passenger service had ended and, after it was purchased by a New York syndicate, diesel equipment replaced electricity on the now freight-only system. In 1968 the Chicago & North Western bought the FDDM&S and, viewing it as a competitor, slowly extinguished it until, in 1983, the FDDM&S vanished except for an extant and vibrant preservation line, the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad.

For historians of transportation and for anyone interested in Iowa history this book is a mine of useful information and insight. The growth of Iowa interurbans, beginning in 1894 with the Tama & Toledo, is explained where appropriate, as are the multiple problems railroading faced after World War II. A final chapter summarizes freight and passenger operations followed by an equipment roster and a section of color plates. One glaring weakness is the author’s evident dislike of politics, which appears only as a *bête noire* constraining capitalists or encouraging other modes of transportation. Regardless, this is a detailed and enjoyable book marked by excellent and plentiful illustrations.

Cultivating Citizens: The Regional Work of Art in the New Deal Era, by Lauren Kroiz. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018. xvi, 292 pp. Illustrations (many in color), notes, bibliography, index. \$65 hardcover.

Reviewer Breanne Robertson is an art historian with the Marine Corps History Division. She has published two articles in the *Annals of Iowa* (2011 and 2015) about New Deal murals.

Art historian H. W. Janson’s postwar pronouncement that American Regionalism constituted “bad art” has left an indelible mark on the scholarly trajectory of American art history. The influential critic and author of the best-selling *History of Art* textbook, first published in 1962, deemed Regionalist painting deficient in both a social and a technical sense. By associating Regionalist landscapes with those of Nazi realism and by omitting the American movement from his textbook, Jansen condemned his former university colleague Grant Wood and other Regionalist artists to cultural obscurity for nearly half a century. Lauren Kroiz’s *Cultivating Citizens* represents the latest scholarly contribution to a growing

literature that seeks to restore the New Deal-era prominence of Regionalism's "big three": Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry. Rather than arguing for the redemptive aesthetic merits or social history embedded in their art, as others have done, Kroiz directs our attention to the artists' pedagogical philosophies, both in the classroom and in their artistic practice, to illuminate the educational work and institutional agency of Regionalist painters at a time when the relationship between culture and democracy was under public debate.

The book is divided into three sections, each centered on specific local disagreements about arts education as navigated by Wood, Benton, and Curry. Part one provides an account of Wood's teaching career in Iowa from his experimental summer art colony at Stone City to his fraught academic appointment at the University of Iowa, where he worked briefly alongside Janson. The departmental marriage of studio art and art history established an academic model for postwar MFA programs, yet it also elicited fierce debates over who possessed the authority to judge contemporary art. Whereas Wood adhered to an apprenticeship model of teaching that emphasized technical precision and local sales as markers of success, his colleagues entrusted international professionals to evaluate contemporary painting and attempted to discredit Wood (and the entire project of Regionalist painting) with allegations of unethical artistic practice, such as a derivative reliance on photographs. Part two further unpacks the personal, political, and pedagogical motivations driving public disagreements by considering Benton's homophobic remarks about Paul Gardner, the director of the Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum in Kansas City, in relation to the museum's pioneering volunteer docent program. Here Kroiz offers keen insight and nuance on an ugly incident in the artist's biography, one that ultimately cost Benton his job at the Kansas City Art Institute. Careful not to excuse his homophobia, Kroiz frames Benton's slur as a response to the perceived usurpation by the museum of his outreach and teaching of Missouri citizens. Less acrimonious but no less important was John Steuart Curry's tenure as the nation's first artist-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin from 1936 to his death in 1946, which is recounted in part three. Highlighting the artist's fruitful collaboration with rural sociologists, Kroiz recasts Curry's aesthetic foibles as a "pedagogy of amateurism" that strengthened an antifascist agenda, based on the tradition of the Danish Folk School, to make art education more appealing and accessible to farmers across the state.

Cultivating Citizens is a richly illustrated and enlightening account of the institutions and educational theories that shaped the public personae of Wood, Benton, and Curry. As a history of ideas rather than an

analysis of objects, the book poses numerous questions that inflect the conversation around regional art with critical nuance: What role does arts education play in American society? Who gets to make art? What are its proper subjects, audiences, and purposes? Kroiz adds considerably to our understanding of Regionalism by integrating the educational theories and teaching activities of Wood, Benton, and Curry with their visual production. In addition, she convincingly argues that the distinctive pedagogies of Regionalism's most prominent practitioners developed in response to the shifting institutional terrain of the 1930s and 1940s. The public debates around art education emerged alongside several pioneering programs, namely the first joint studio art and art history department at University of Iowa, the first volunteer docent program at the Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum, and the first artist-in-residence program at the University of Wisconsin. In the process, Kroiz deftly constructs an enlarged cultural landscape through the intellectual histories of artists, curators, professors, and other professional associates with whom these artists engaged.

The challenge, for some readers, comes with the conclusion of the book, in which the author asserts that the historical debates of the 1930s and 1940s offer lessons for art educators working in the current political climate. Kroiz has done substantial reading and thinking about pedagogical theory and the purpose of higher education in the present; however, her musings belie the pedagogical purpose of her project. A sudden density of prose that is also thick with theoretical references departs sharply in tone from the preceding chapters and suggests that the book is directed primarily at fellow academics and not lay readers, after all. The author's politics, which champion a progressive role for the humanities in the preservation of democracy, may alienate readers of a conservative bent as well. Even so, *Cultivating Citizens* is a welcome contribution for its thoughtful and thought-provoking reconsideration of American Regionalism.

The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa, by Steven M. Avella. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018. xxvi, 433 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 hardcover, \$14.99 Kindle edition.

Reviewer Michael J. Pfeifer is professor of history at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is finishing a book on the social history of Catholicism across American regions for New York University Press.

Near the beginning of his fine history of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Des Moines, Steven M. Avella, a historian and priest who teaches at