



Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York

By Helen Langa

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During the 1930s, the era of the Depression and the New Deal, American artists transformed printmaking into one of the decade's most exciting forms of art. As a cheap, vital, and egalitarian means of artistic expression, prints came close to realizing the ideal of creating "art for the millions." In this dynamic book, Helen Langa shows how innovative printmakers developed "social viewpoint" works that focused on contemporary issues of labor justice, antiracism, and antifascist activism. Discussing artists such as Aaron Douglas, Mabel Dwight, Boris Gorelick, Harry Gottlieb, Elizabeth Olds, Harry Sternberg, Joseph Vogel, and Hale Woodruff, Langa explains how they developed new types of meaningful content, worked in modern, yet accessible, styles, invented new technical processes, and sought fresh strategies for distributing their work to the public. Many, but not all, of the artists she considers worked for the Federal Art Project at the Graphic Arts Division workshop; each struggled to resolve the conflicting goals of reaching a mass audience while also critiquing social injustice and promoting radical idealism.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

"Helen Langa's compelling study of 1930s social viewpoint prints offers a fresh look at the relationship between the decade's visual culture and its social and political bases. The author illuminates the artists' struggles with conflicting demands-how to advocate revolution within a defense of democracy, and how to engage the social world using aesthetic criteria that advocated distance from it. Her engaging account of these contradictions is a major achievement."—Ellen Wiley Todd, author of *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street*

"Privileging 1930s prints, and contextualizing their political, social, cultural, and economic dimensions more completely than any previous book on the subject, Helen Langa's *Radical Art* is a welcome addition to studies of American art during the Great Depression. Her astute analysis of social viewpoint styles and themes is a significant contribution. Historically detailed and persuasively argued, this book will be an indispensable source for students and scholars of twentieth-century American art."—Erika Doss, author of *Twentieth-Century American Art*

"This beautifully nuanced study reaffirms the primacy of politically engaged printmaking in the 1930s. Langa is attentive to the ways artists invented imagery to address aesthetic dilemmas as well as social ones, with the goal, always, of raising the public's consciousness of labor, gender, and racial inequities. Her research is superb and her sensitivity to a wide range of printmaker's voices, male and female, white and black, is exemplary."—Wanda M. Corn, author of *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*

"*Radical Art* is a landmark study, both in the history of printmaking and in the history of American art of the thirties. There is no better explicator of the graphic arts of this era and their cultural context than Helen Langa. Her thoroughly researched and compellingly written volume is a major scholarly contribution."—Betsy Fahlman, author of *John Ferguson Weir: The Labor of Art*

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Helen Langa is Associate Professor of Art History at American University.

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