

Midwest Realities: Regional Painting 1920-1950, organized by the Southern Ohio Museum and Cultural Center in Portsmouth, was on display at the Riffe Gallery from April 13 through June 17, 1995. The 39 paintings presented images that are the products of the American cultural, political and economic climate of the 1920s, '30s and '40s.

With the current interest in redefining and reassessing American culture, art produced by Midwestern painters between the end of World War I and the end of World War II is being viewed with increased interest. The paintings create a bridge to a wider culture, geography and history, and shed critical light on older Midwest American paintings.

Midwestern art in the 1920's, '30s and '40s was influenced by continuing industrialization, a political and economic climate that resulted in the Great Depression and the effects of the modernist movement on regional artists.

As the Midwest moved from being primarily an agricultural society in the 19th century to becoming increasingly industrial in the early 20th century, what had been a frontier region of farms and small towns became a major part of America's industrial machine. Those rapid changes excited some people and frightened others. In this exhibition several works speak to the split between urban and rural, agricultural and industrial in Midwestern life.

After World War I, painters, like many other Americans, turned away from Europe and became absorbed in their own surroundings. During the 1920s and '30s, landscape paintings of the Great Lakes region became filled with the subtle poetry and layered messages of artists looking at America in a new way. Many artists became guerrilla defenders of a landscape whose beauties and layered meanings had long defined their region as the essence of America. Midwestern painters began redefining and reinventing American art. Today, as America again attempts to redefine itself in the midst of an ever-changing world, it is useful to look back to find how American artists once resolved the questions faced by Americans today.

The Riffe Gallery, operated by the Ohio Arts Council, showcases the work of Ohio's artists and the collections of the state's museums and galleries. The Riffe Gallery is located in the Vern Riffe Center for the Government and the Arts, State and High Streets, Columbus, OH. Gallery hours are Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 11-4 p.m., Thursday and Friday 11-7:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 11-4 p.m. Admission is free. For information or to schedule a tour call the Riffe Gallery at 614/644-9624.

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