

# Gallup's 'New Deal' for ageless works of art

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## WPA website in the works

Looming on the horizon is a virtual museum featuring a unified collection of Depression era art, furniture, decorative objects, and architecture. This vast national treasure trove of artworks emerged from numerous *public works* New Deal art projects occurring under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the years 1933 to 1942.

Thanks to Roosevelt's federal Public Works of Art Project, put in place to stimulate the Great Depression's dire economy, a diverse group of artists of varying levels of experience and notoriety contributed sculptures, lithographs, furniture, architecture, wall paintings, Navajo weavings, watercolors, oil paintings, murals, silkscreen prints, Western art, and decorative works to various PWAP projects nationwide.



Executive Director of GallupARTS Rose Eason said, "Gallup was one of four federal art centers in New Mexico during the New Deal. It was the last one to be established in the state. It got a bit of a late start, but it ran from 1938 to 1942. That's the reason why our community has such a large collection of New Deal work."

Works included in the New Deal federal art collections were either commissioned, purchased, or donated.

"Stuff was being produced by the art center, stuff was being exhibited at the art center, the county was purchasing work through the art center, and artists were donating work through the arts center," she said.

Eason told the *Sun* that the New Deal artworks featured on the future website are located at Gallup-McKinley County schools, the Octavia Fellin Public Library, or at the McKinley County courthouse. Many works are publicly accessible, while others are not available for public viewing because they are housed at Red Rock Museum Storage or located at a school.

"Roswell was a federal arts center under the New Deal. They kept theirs going after the New Deal and now that's the Roswell Art Museum. Gallup, unfortunately, didn't do that and so this project is trying to revive that," Eason said.

Eason started working as a project director on the Gallup New Deal Art Virtual Museum project in 2017.

"This project rests on the shoulders of other community members who were working to archive the collection and preserve it, including Caroline Milligan, in particular," she said. "She did a lot of work with the county to research their New Deal artworks and to showcase them in the historic county courthouse in a professional manner. She did a lot of investigating into the collection. Her archive is what jumpstarted this project."

GallupARTS is currently in the final phase of obtaining additional funding to build the website. The first grant, received from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2018, was used to research the art collection and plan a virtual museum to showcase it. Later, in 2021, GallupARTS received a \$100K grant that funded the development of the future website's prototype.

Presently, GallupARTS is waiting to learn if its production grant proposal has been approved.

"If we get the production grant, we will be able to start building the website in March 2023. We anticipate a launch date of late 2024, early 2025," Eason said.

When the New Deal Art Virtual Museum site is completed, it will feature numerous ways to access various artworks and collections. Visitors will also be able to read scholarly perspectives on the collection in the "Special Exhibits" section or tap on an image in the "Creative Pairings" section to view a film, painting, or poem that a local artist created in response to specific artwork from the collection.

To get to know the New Deal's artists better, visitors can "meet" all of the named artists in the collection—27 in all—by visiting the site's "Meet the Artists" section.

"What makes it a really special collection—based on the research that I've done—we have the largest collection of artworks by Lloyd Moylan. He's kind of been lost to history but he was a pretty prominent New Mexican artist and a pretty active artist under the New Deal during the late 30s and early 40s," Eason said. "He did a 2,000-square-foot mural in the historic county courthouse courtroom. That's one of the major pieces."

Eason hopes the virtual museum will inspire visitors to visit publicly accessible New Deal artworks in person. "It's not just a rich and robust New Deal art collection. It's a rich and robust art collection. It really captures a lot of what was happening in New Mexico at the time in terms of different art movements and different artists," she said.

**To learn about the Gallup New Deal Art Virtual Museum, visit: <https://galluparts.org/newdeal/>**

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