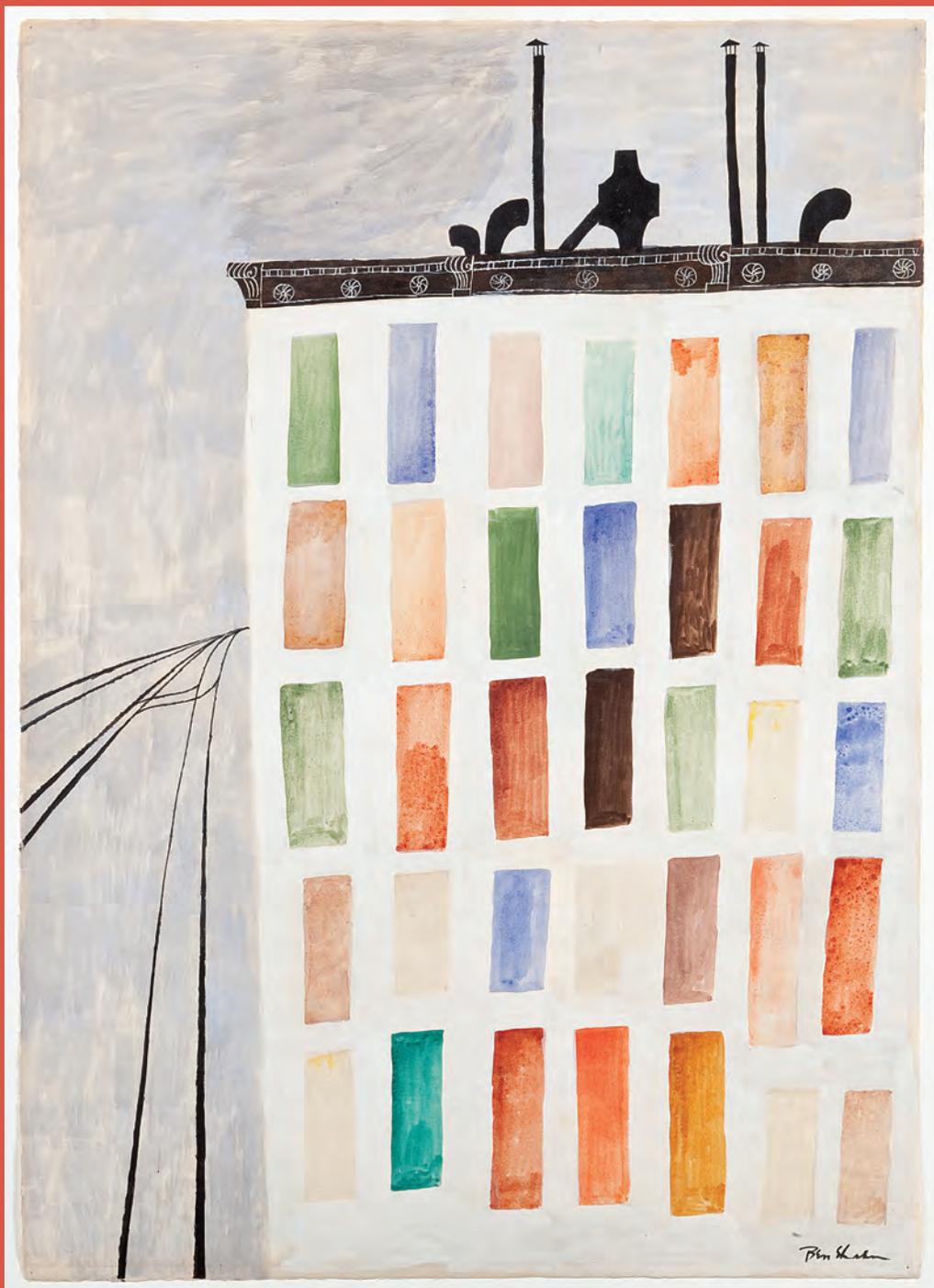


The World
Through
My Eyes:

Celebrating
the Legacy of
Ben Shahn





Ben Shahn
Paterson, circa 1950
Watercolor on paper mounted
on cardboard
32 x 23 inches (image size)
Collection of Daphne Williams Fox
and the family of William Carlos Williams
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The World Through My Eyes:

Celebrating the Legacy of Ben Shahn

September 9 – December 11, 2019

On the cover:

Ben Shahn

*VIII unexpected meetings from For the Sake of a
Single Verse...from The Notebooks of Malte Laurids*

Brigge by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968

Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York

Color lithograph on Velin d'Arches paper

Edition 706 of 950

22 ½ x 17 ¾ inches (unframed)

University Galleries Permanent Collection

Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein

2007.5.8

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at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

University Galleries

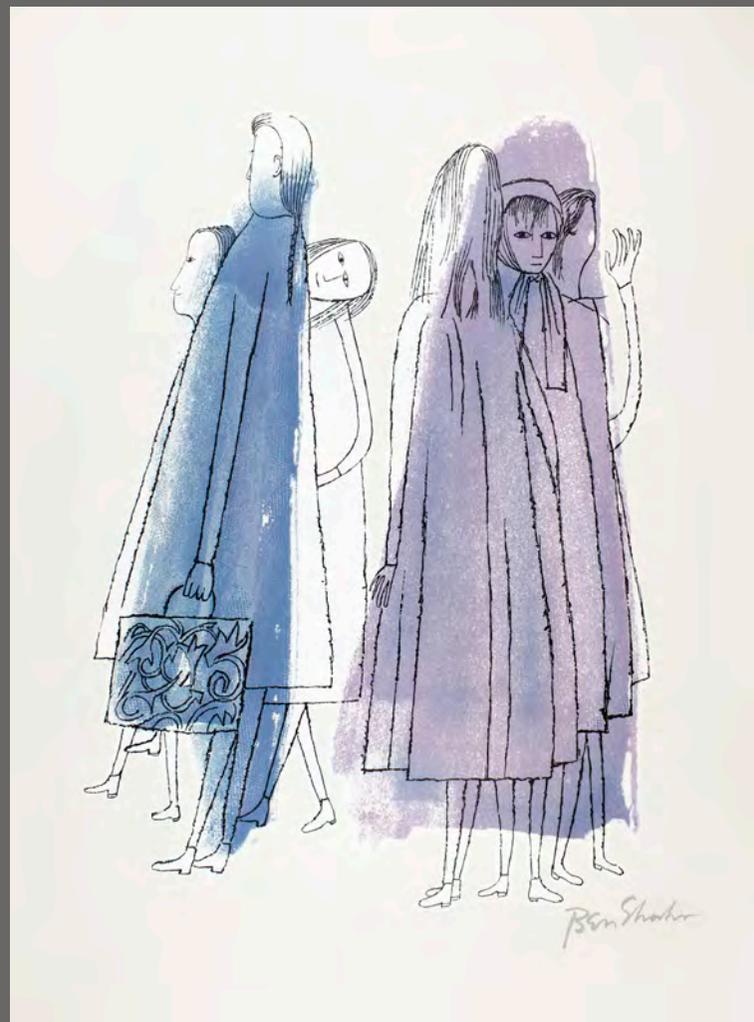
WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY



Ben Shahn
Le Capitaine Dreyfus from *The Dreyfus
Affair*, 1984
Lithograph on Arches 150gm pure rag
verg  paper
Published by Crossroad Books,
Cincinnati, OH
Edition 222 of 450
15 1/2 x 12 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Bill Westheimer
2007.3.1
  2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by
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Ben Shahn

*X to days of childhood from For the Sake of a Single Verse... from
The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968*

Color lithograph on handmade paper

26 x 23 ¼ inches (unframed)

University Galleries Permanent Collection

Gift of Linda Von Cino

2006.13.1

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Ben Shahn
XVIII screams of women in labor from
For the Sake of a Single Verse...from
The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge
by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968
Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Portfolio of 24 color lithographs on
Velin d'Arches paper
Edition 706 of 950
22 ½ x 17 ¾ inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein
2007.5.8
© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by
VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Introduction

Kristen Evangelista, Director

“It is the mission of art to remind man from time to time that he is human, and the time is ripe, just now, today, for such a reminder.”

—Ben Shahn

In his art and life, Ben Shahn believed in the humanity of all people—a mission that remains just as relevant today, 50 years after his passing. Shahn’s concern for humanity is evident throughout this exhibition, in particular in the portfolio, *For the Sake of a Single Verse* (1968). Here, Shahn illustrates a passage of German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. In these expressive lithographs, Shahn portrays different individuals passing through life phases from birth to death, ultimately revealing universal experiences that defy boundaries of race, religion, and class.

The William Paterson University Galleries is honored to present the exhibition, *The World Through My Eyes: Celebrating the Legacy of Ben Shahn*, on the occasion of our 40th anniversary. This prominent social realist artist is the namesake for our building, the Ben Shahn Center for the Visual Arts. Shahn died the same year that the building was constructed and the board of trustees chose to name the building in his honor. According to former board chair Rabbi Martin Freedman, “It was natural to name it for him since he had been an artist here since the Thirties. It was in the late 1960s, a time of social consciences reawakening.”¹ Then, over a decade after the artist’s passing, a formal dedication ceremony was held on May 12, 1980.

An article in William Paterson University’s student newspaper, *The Beacon*, states the prominent poet Archibald MacLeish was invited to speak at the ceremony along with the artist’s widow, Bernarda Bryson; Selden Rodman, author of *Portrait of the Artist as an American: A Biography of Ben Shahn*; and Rabbi Martin Freedman.² At the event,

Bryson presented her husband’s serigraph, *Branches of Water and Desire* (1965) as a gift to the University Galleries Permanent Collection. An accompanying exhibition included: *Deserted Fairground* (1948), *Silent Music* (1950), *Paterson* (1953), *TV Antennae* (1953), *Mine Building* (1956), and *Wheat Field* (1958).

The University Galleries’ founding gallery director Dr. Nancy Einreinhofer maintained contact with Bernarda Bryson and, in 2002, curated the exhibition, *Bernarda Bryson Shahn: A Selection of Drawings, Paintings and Prints from 1928-1998*. This retrospective exhibition provided long-overdue recognition to Bryson, who devoted herself to supporting her husband (even assisting in his mural at the Bronx Central Post Office) and raising a family while being a highly accomplished lithographer and painter in her own right.

Over the past 20 years, the University Galleries has acquired other works on paper by Shahn including two portfolios: *For the Sake of a Single Verse* (1968) and *The Dreyfus Affair* (1984), which form the core of this exhibition. In addition, the University Galleries Permanent Collection includes 18 unpublished photographs that are rare documentation of the creation of Shahn’s mural, *Resources of America* (1938-1939), at the Bronx Central Post Office. These photographs have never been exhibited and were donated by the daughter of a former employee of the Bronx Central Post Office. Loans from public and private collections provide greater historical and thematic breadth to enhance this exhibition. We are especially fortunate for the loan of the artwork *Paterson* (1950), since a related factory scene of Paterson was displayed during the 1980 dedication ceremony. The former artwork was given to the poet William Carlos Williams, who is most well-known for his multi-volume poem about the city, published 1946-1958.

On the whole, this exhibition celebrates the legacy of Shahn, who dedicated his career to social justice and the human condition. As our namesake, he has left an indelible mark on our institution and

reminds us of the ongoing importance of civil rights, political and religious freedom, and democracy. His values resonate with the University's core values, particularly the commitment to "help students think imaginatively and critically and encourage innovative solutions to social issues...and the ethical dilemmas confronting our communities, regions, nation, and the world."

The World Through My Eyes: Celebrating the Legacy of Ben Shahn benefited from the expertise, coordination, support, and encouragement of numerous individuals. I would like to thank the Shahn family, in particular Ezra Shahn for his kindness. We extend our deep appreciation to Dr. Alejandro Anreus, William Paterson University professor of art, whose well-honed scholarship and curatorial guidance informed many aspects of this endeavor. His essay provides an enlightening overview of the artist's career and analysis of the works in the exhibition. I would also like to acknowledge Ben Shahn scholar Dr. Diana L. Linden, who offered insightful interpretation of the photographs of the Bronx Central Post Office informed by her 2015 publication, *Ben Shahn's New Deal Murals*.

We are grateful for the generous and collaborative spirit of the following exhibition lenders: the Newark Public Library, New Jersey State Museum, the Art Galleries at Passaic County Community College, and private collectors Daphne Williams Fox and the family of William Carlos Williams, and Warren and Andrea Grover.

The University Galleries relies on pivotal support from William Paterson University including Dr. Richard Helldobler, president; Dr. Joshua B. Powers, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs; Dr. Sandra Hill, associate provost for academic affairs; Daryl Joseph Moore, dean of the College of the Arts and Communication; Loretta McLaughlin Vignier, associate dean of the College of the Arts and Communication; and Lauren Razzore, chair of the Art Department.

We are fortunate to once again enlist graphic designer James Wawrzewski, whose adept skills and clear vision is matched by patience and cooperation, yielding this top-notch publication.

Gallery staff worked diligently and thoroughly to make this project possible. Emily Johnsen, gallery manager, carefully coordinated and problem-solved the details of this exhibition and publication. Casey Mathern, collections manager, oversaw the handling and framing of works from our permanent collection. Graduate assistants Angel Fosuhene and Taylor Cacici and intern Emily Noonan provided valuable support throughout the course of the exhibition.

I would also like to thank founding gallery director Dr. Nancy Einreinhofer for her dedicated stewardship of the University Galleries for 32 years and for her helpful advice and enduring support. She was an integral member of the 40th anniversary planning committee, which also included Lavene Gass, Emily Johnsen, Casey Mathern, Dean Daryl Joseph Moore, Maureen O'Connor, Phillip Sprayberry, Associate Dean Loretta McLaughlin Vignier, Janis Schwartz, and Mary Beth Zeman. President Emeritus Arnold Speert and former Dean Jay Ludwig graciously shared valuable institutional history. We are grateful to all of these individuals for their insight, encouragement, and advocacy of the University Galleries.

The World Through My Eyes: Celebrating the Legacy of Ben Shahn would not have been possible without government support of the arts—much like the artist himself who was employed as a photographer and graphic designer by such government agencies as the Farm Security Administration and the U.S. Office of War Information. This project is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, we are fortunate to receive ongoing funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tom Groenfelt, "College memorializes a life in art," *The Record* (Hackensack, NJ) May 13, 1980.
2. Dorothy Ryan, "MacLeish dedicates Ben Shahn Hall," *The Beacon* (Wayne, NJ), June 23, 1980, pg. 2.



Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, female textile
worker panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939,
Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.10

Art and Politics: Some Notes on Ben Shahn

Alejandro Anreus, PhD

“Ben was always conscious of injustice, no doubt due to his immigrant background. But I think he became truly political starting with his Sacco Vanzetti series in 1931.”

—Bernarda Bryson¹

My first encounter with the work of Ben Shahn was in my early teenage years. My grandmother kept a bulletin board of sorts in her kitchen, where cooking recipes, cards of saints and pictures of people were tacked. There, by the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Martín de Porres, were the faces of two dark skinned men (which I thought were relatives) and an image cut out of a magazine of a rather flat painting of two men dressed in suits, sitting and handcuffed to each other. In time I learned that the “dark skinned men” were Emiliano Zapata and Pedro Albizu Campos, and the painting was of Shahn’s “Sacco and Vanzetti” series in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. In high school I saw more of his work reproduced in books, eventually read the MoMA catalogue with the text by James Thrall Soby, and finally saw his paintings, either at MoMA or the Whitney; the only two New York museums where his pictures could be seen hanging (although at MoMA it was usually in a hallway or by a bathroom, next to the Mexican muralists or Romare Bearden) in the 1970s. I was taken by what I perceived as a poetic duality in his work; on the one hand a commitment to narrative and politics, and on the other a melancholic, even lonely quality.

This exhibition brings together a wide range of his work on paper, from an early etching from the 1920s to a wood engraving from 1966, three years before his death. The earliest print, *Rabbi*, c. 1922-23, reflects the ethnic and immigrant environment of Shahn’s youth, as well as the remnants of the “Ash Can” school realism that he

encountered at both the Art Student’s League and the National Academy of Design, where he studied.

After his marriage to his first wife, Tillie Goldstein in 1924, the couple travelled to North Africa and Europe, spending some time in Paris, where Shahn absorbed the influences of Cézanne, Matisse, Rouault, and Dufy. But the appearance of what would evolve as his own visual language does not take place until his 1930 series “The Dreyfus Affair,” a group of small watercolors inspired by a book that Shahn read at the time.² Empty backgrounds, pale watercolor washes, carefully lettered names and calligraphic figures—in portraits and busts, full single figures and in pairs—are the elements that appear in these works. Significant among these is the subtle use of line and delicate colors; iconic aspects of the artist’s work for the rest of his life. And of course, the fact that these are serial pictures grounded in a historical event of socio-political meaning.

In 1931-32 with the “Sacco and Vanzetti” series, then the “Tom Mooney” series (1932-33), Shahn displayed a highly original use of both the tempera and gouache mediums, combining flat colors with crisp delineation, fusing elements of caricature with realism, all the while basing himself on photographic documentation of both cases. He was no longer looking back at a cause celebre from the previous century, but finding inspiration in the conflicts of his time, of the present, be this the trial and execution of two Italian American anarchists, or the first degree murder conviction of a labor organizer.³

During the years of World War II, Shahn worked for the Office of War Information (OWI), producing a number of gouache and tempera paintings that became posters through the photo-offset process. *This Is Nazi Brutality* and *We French Workers Warn You . . .*, both of 1942, are among the most effective posters of this period.⁴ These are compositions that evoke a sense of claustrophobia, where hands and faces are used in an oblique, indirect manner, and text is bold, yet

minimal. By this time the artist's politics had evolved into those of a convinced, progressive New Dealer. Earlier in his career he had shifted from left wing liberal, to fellow traveler, and unlike many of his contemporaries, had not joined the Communist Party.⁵

Most Shahn scholars agree that by the end of World War II, his art shifted from the “social realism” of the 1930s, and the “personal realism” of the early to mid-1940s, towards a more symbolic, even mythic representation.⁶ A work from 1946, *We Want Peace*, falls within this period, and is another offset poster, this time produced for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Political Action Committee.⁷ The foreshortened figure of a thin boy with a begging hand and dark circles under his eyes is loosely based on a photographic source. The message is clear; you will avoid oppression, war and starvation through the democratic electoral process. In the year after the end of the second world war, this meant voting pro-labor, that is, for the Democratic Party.

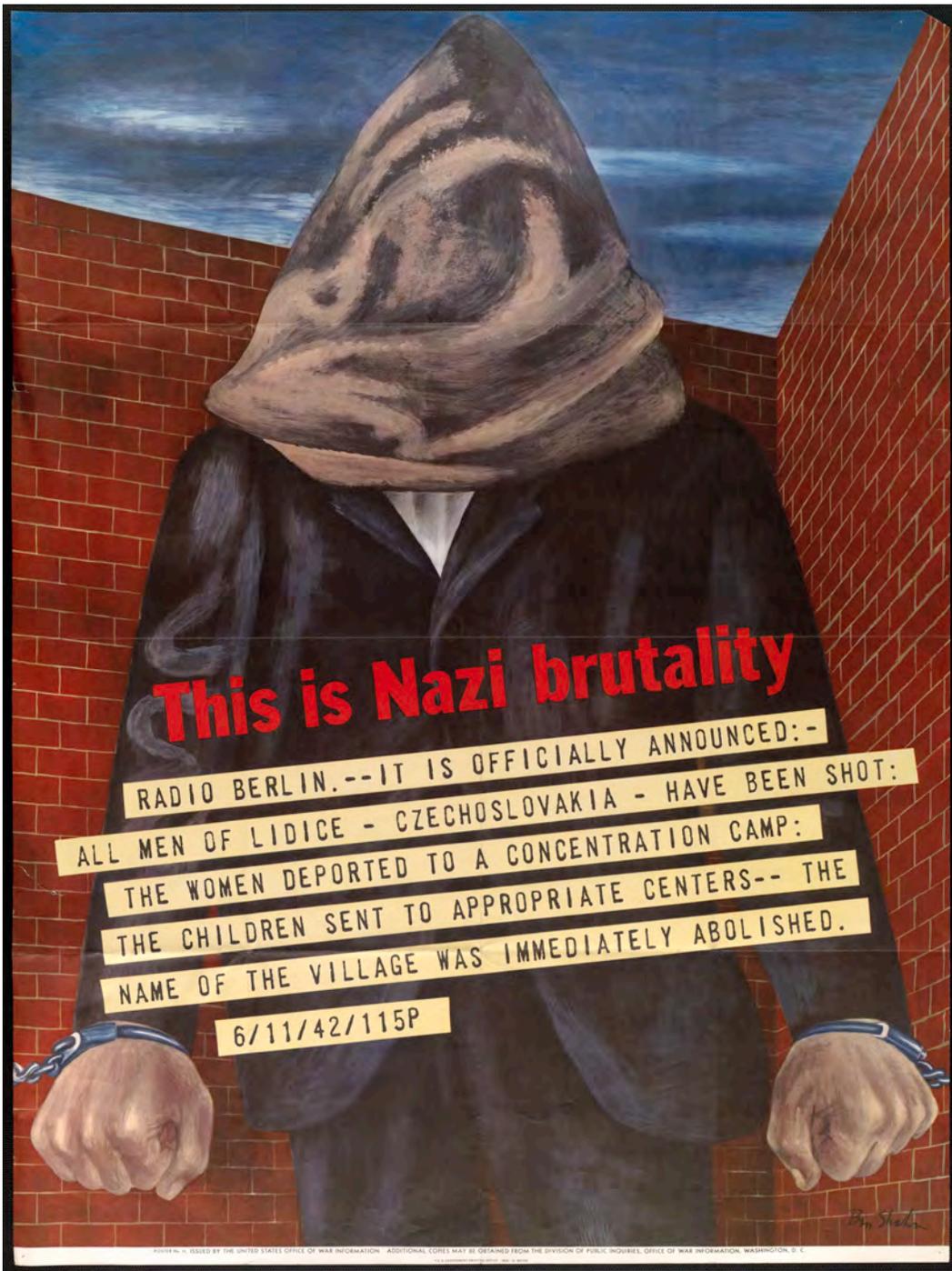
Two years later Shahn's disillusionment with the Truman administration led him to support Henry Wallace for President under the banner of the Progressive Party.⁸ On behalf of the Wallace campaign Shahn produced a satirical poster with President Truman playing the piano and Republican governor and presidential candidate Thomas Dewey lying on top like a lounge singer.⁹

By 1952 Shahn was back in the fold of the Democratic Party, making drawings on behalf of Adlai Stevenson as the presidential candidate. In 1964 he supported Johnson against Goldwater, producing two of his most effective silkscreen posters satirizing the Arizona senator as a “No Sayer” (*Say No to the No-Sayer, Vote Johnson*) and a bratty infant. Yet four years later disillusioned with the Vietnam War, Shahn supported Eugene McCarthy as the “peace” candidate in the democratic primaries with a silkscreen of a dove.

In 1966 his ink and wash drawing of Martin Luther King, Jr. was transformed into an exquisite wood engraving by Stefan Martin.¹⁰ A powerful head of King preaching, it is one of countless images of African Americans by Shahn (these can be traced back to his pictures of the 1930s). It is significant that it is a portrait of the civil rights leader while he was still alive. Shahn's support of civil rights is evident through a series of prints, starting in 1965 with a portfolio of



Ben Shahn
Rabbi, c. 1922-23
Black ink etching on tan wove paper
10 x 8 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Jim Deutsch
1994.4.1
© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by
VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Ben Shahn

This Is Nazi Brutality, 1942

Offset photolithograph in colors

37 ½ x 28 ¼ inches (unframed)

Distributed by the U.S. Office of

War Information

University Galleries Permanent Collection

Gift of William F. Williams

2002.10.1

© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by
VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

nine photo-offset lithographs for the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee (ACLU), followed by three photo silkscreen reproduction portraits of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney of that same year.¹¹ In all these images, the jagged and lyrical line so associated with Shahn starting in the 1950s, is displayed in its full range.

The works in this exhibition allow us a glimpse at Shahn's stylistic evolution through a series of graphic works. What is a constant

throughout, even as the specifics of his politics were shifting, was his life-long commitment to a figurative, socially engaged art, grounded in a humanist vision of solidarity and compassion.

As Shahn stated, "*The public function of art has always been one of creating a community. That is not necessarily its intention, but it is its result . . . It is the images we hold in common, the characters of novels and plays, the great buildings, the complex pictorial images and their meanings, and the symbolized concepts, principles, and great ideas of philosophy and religion that have created the human community.*"¹²

FOOTNOTES

1. Bernarda Bryson, interview by author, Roosevelt, New Jersey, October 12, 1993.
2. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 36-37.
3. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed by electric chair in August of 1927. Tom Mooney was pardoned and released by California governor Culbert Olsen in 1939, after the labor organizer served twenty-three years in prison.
4. Ironically the majority of Shahn's paintings for OWI posters were turned down; they were considered too violent and depressing.
5. Bernarda Bryson, interview by author, Roosevelt, New Jersey, October 12, 1993. Bryson told me that her husband was always a skeptic about political parties. He convinced her to leave the CP USA. Although Shahn was close to Rivera while assisting in both the Rockefeller Center and New Worker's School murals, he maintained his skepticism regarding both Trotskyists and Lovestonites. Other colleagues and friends of Shahn did join the CP, such as Stuart Davis, Phillip Evergood, William Gropper, etc. Party membership cards and related correspondence are among these artists papers at the Archives of American Art.
6. Matthew Baigell argues this in much of his literature on the period, as well as Frances K. Pohl in her 1993 Pomegranate book *Ben Shahn*.
7. Shahn used a gouache painting from the same year, titled *Hunger*, for the poster.
8. The Progressive Party was a coalition of disillusioned left wing New Dealers, Communist Party members, and fellow travelers.
9. Shahn based this image on a photo of President Truman playing the piano, with actress Lauren Bacall sitting on top of the piano and singing.
10. Published by the International Graphic Arts Society, Inc., New York, in an edition of 300. This image reappeared in a 1968 photolithograph accompanied by text from King's speech, *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, which is the work in the current exhibition.
11. The three young men were civil rights activists killed in Mississippi during the summer of 1964.
12. Shahn, *The Shape of Content*, pp. 130-131.

Drawn Not to Be Seen: Ben Shahn's Preparatory Cartoons for the Bronx Central Post Office Mural, 1938-39

Diana L. Linden, PhD

Currently on view at the William Paterson University Galleries are eighteen black and white photographs, displayed in a case, adhering to the best practices of the museum profession. Each photograph shows a mural cartoon drawn by celebrated American artist Ben Shahn (1898 – 1969), produced while creating his federally commissioned mural, *Resources of America*, situated in the Bronx Central Post Office, 1938 – 39. Possibly, the artist Bernarda Bryson, his companion and later his wife, shot these photographs; we do not know. The images of brown paper cartoons with planning marks and initial drawings and sketches—crucial stages in mural making—were photographed while tacked up on the Post Office's interior walls; in

other words, while Shahn was working on them. What these images show us are Shahn's work method, drawing style, and progress on the Bronx mural which totaled thirteen individual panels in all. Although the eighteen photographs are a means of artistic preservation, paradoxically, the cartoons were never intended for public viewing. They would go on to become muddied with pencil and egg tempera paint, and as the artist worked, would be used up, and then discarded. Their limited temporality stands in contrast to the permanence of Shahn's finished mural in the Bronx. Forgotten about for decades, the photographs were only recently discovered and gifted to the William Paterson University Galleries' collection in 2014 and 2017.¹



“The Best and Scope of America”: The 1938 Bronx Mural Competition

Early in 1938, the Treasury Section of Paintings and Sculpture ran a highly competitive, national competition to decorate the newly built Bronx Central Post Office. Over 200 artists eagerly submitted their mural designs. Both Bryson and Shahn anonymously (as was the protocol), and separately, applied to the competition. Oddly, they were jointly awarded the commission. Bryson believed Shahn’s was the stronger submission and deferred to his plans.² Shahn titled his work “Resources of America” referring to the multiple workers the mural heralded. Historian David C. Ward recently referred to Shahn’s mural as a “series of portraits,” validating the “virtuosity of the American laborer.”³

As demonstrated in Shahn’s two-panel competition submission now housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (fig. 1), his original and lasting conception was to introduce Bronx residents to fellow laborers from regions and industries, fields and factories, beyond those located in New York. Working as a photographer for the

Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration (RA/FSA) in 1935 and 1938, Shahn had traveled throughout the American South, and across small towns in the Midwest. These locations, people, and experiences would later feed into his Bronx mural. Explaining his artistic goals for the commission Shahn recalled: “There was no suggestion as to what to do and I, having experienced myself, I decided those people who are as provincial as only city people can be, to show them the best and scope of America.”⁴

Who are these workers? Steelworkers, textile workers, cotton pickers, and electrical workers. Men threshing hay, a lone woman spooling lines of thread—one of the few images of women working in industry in New Deal murals. By juxtaposing figures and panels, and different phases of production, Shahn creates a sense of the multiplicity of workers and of collaboration necessary to transform raw materials into finished goods. The painter upheld certain political ideologies through the vehicle of the workers’ bodies. Shahn promoted the cause of industrial unionism by portraying laborers in such industries as automobiles, textiles (2017.4.3), mining (left half of 2014.6.5), and steel all represented by the recently organized Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) (1935). In contrast to the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), the CIO was more radical, racially and ethnically diverse, and counted committed socialists among its leaders. Despite the pronounced labor unrest of the era, and the militancy of the CIO, Shahn’s mural promoted worker productivity and harmony to underscore the successes of industrial unionism, and the importance of the worker.

The cartoons testify to the advanced state of craftsmanship which created the mural. When viewing the photographs, notice the energy exuded by the workers and that each one is fully engaged at their

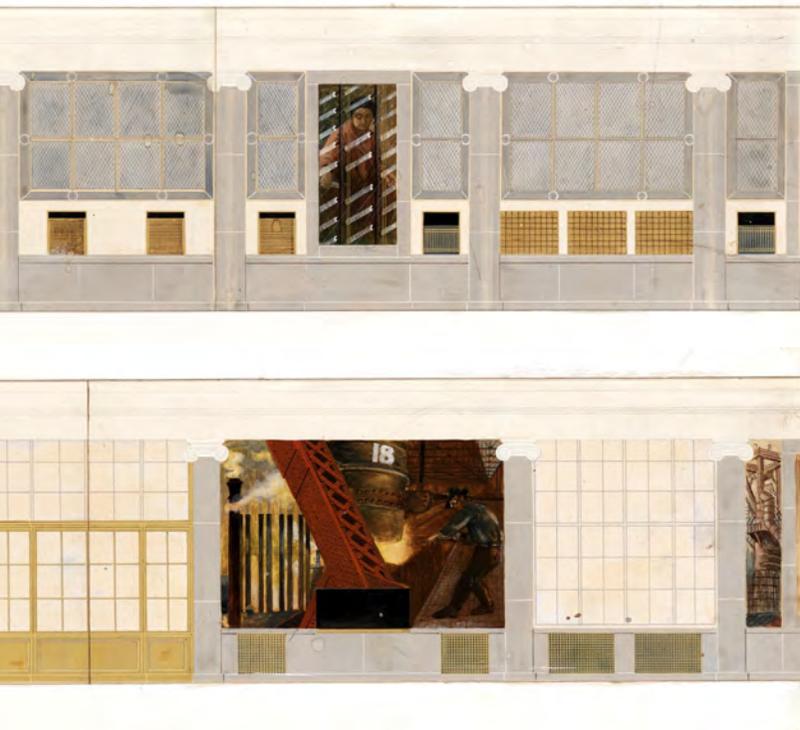
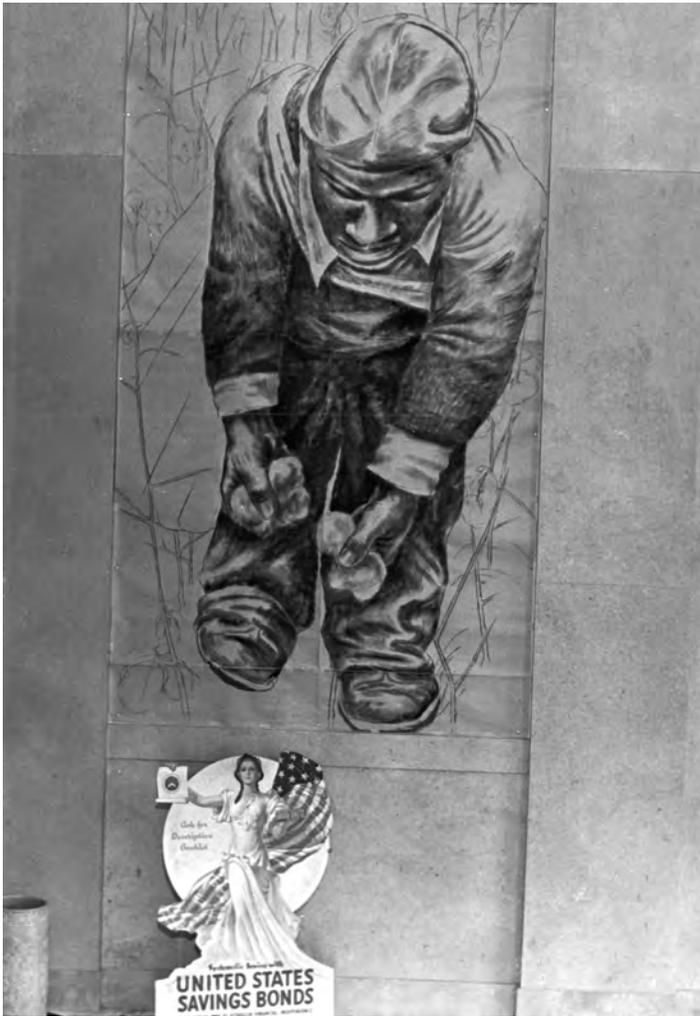


FIG. 1
Ben Shahn
Resources for America (two panels, mural study, Bronx Central Post Office, New York), 1938.
Tempera on fiberboard, two panels, each: 5 inches x 39 ½ inches. 1974.28.40
Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Transfer from the General Services Administration
© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn,
 worker picking cotton in *Resources of
 America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post
 Office), n.d.
 Photograph
 7 x 5 inches
 University Galleries Permanent Collection
 Gift of Leslie Lawner
 2014.6.1

tasks. It appears that Shahn worked on several cartoons simultaneously, as each drawing shows a different stage of completion but all but one remains incomplete. Shahn would first block out and attentively draw the workers' bodies; he would then draw or paint outwards from the figure and attend to the worker's setting or work space or their machinery. Scanning the cartoons, we see that Shahn enlarges the figures beyond natural scale, body parts are purposefully out of proportion, and that he locates the worker up close to the picture plane placing them in direct confrontation with the viewer in order to increase the worker's power and impact. Due to the limitations of the post office's architecture, which precluded painting a continuous panorama, each worker owns their own panel. Shahn painted the entire mural in an overall tawny tone so that through the use of color he brought the thirteen panels and workers together, unifying the disparate elements, moving beyond architectural barriers, and creating a unified vision.

Because America's workers are dedicated to their work, they do not make eye contact with the viewers, with us. It is we who have entered into their work space. The white female textile workers shown only in pencil outline (2014.6.10), the African American man who stoops down low to pick cotton most likely as a sharecropper, an image based on a Shahn FSA photograph (2014.6.1)⁵, and the broad-shouldered gleaner pitching grain up into the air, (2017.4.5) do not acknowledge their audiences. Instead, the workers cast their heads down focused on their tools and jobs such as the blueprint held in the meaty hands of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) worker (2014.6.6) or the fine lines of thread (2017.4.3) delicately controlled by the male textile worker. Here, as the textile worker manages the complex loom, his enlarged hands plunge into our space. Many have turned their backs to us, such as the man suspended over a hydroelectric dam. Their figures are bulky, but never approach the overly muscled, heroized worker common within much New Deal art. They do not pose, instead they labor.

Walt Whitman, Workers' Hands, and Catholic Controversy

Shahn's signature style of emphasizing hands matters. Hands at work and hands in resistance were potent symbols of the 1930s. Shahn has purposefully enlarged the many workers' hands to amplify their importance as tools of both laborers and artists alike, and also of the writer Walt Whitman. The sole completed study (2014.6.2) shows



Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of
 Ben Shahn, Walt Whitman in *Resources of
 America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post
 Office), n.d.
 Photograph
 5 x 7 inches
 University Galleries Permanent Collection
 Gift of Leslie Lawner
 2014.6.2

Whitman lecturing to a gathering of 1930s workers, pointing to a chalkboard on which is written out a selection of his prose. Here, Whitman's hands, too, are oversized, out of proportion, suggesting according to scholar Kenneth M. Price, "...that the artist's hand supports and ennobles the many other hands Shahn depicts" through the Bronx mural.⁶ It was a requirement of the commission that a completed study go on public view in December 1938 to inform the public of the project's progress. In this drawing, Whitman points to his own verse on the chalkboard from the poem "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood" which was met by strong objections by the local Catholic Archdiocese and created controversy and trouble for Shahn. Fordham University's Reverend Cox maintained that the Whitman poem preached "religious skepticism" and that by commissioning Shahn, the federal government was "sponsoring irreligion in art." Ultimately, Shahn decided to substitute a passage from a different poem, "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days," also by Whitman so that the project might not be canceled. This photograph has captured the original Whitman quotation and maintains Shahn's

true vision for his Bronx murals where Whitman served as the spiritual guide for America's workers, and artists did not have to contend with censors.

Ben Shahn often utilized his creativity at the service of labor and unions. In fact, in the late 1930s, concurrent with production of the Bronx murals, Shahn worked as a graphic artist for the CIO to advance workers' rights. By examining these 1938-39 photographs of the early stages of *Resources of America*, we are reminded of the enormous planning and effort that Shahn put into creating his panoramic tribute to Americans at work. By considering these "behind the scenes" views of his completed mural, these eighteen photographs remind us that Shahn's self-conception was that of a worker, that he was a member of the Artists' Union, that he considered his art to be his labor, and throughout his career worked on many causes inclusive of workers' rights. *Resources of America* is perhaps his finest tribute to the workers of America.



Unknown artist (possibly
Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben
Shahn, TVA engineer panel of
Resources of America,
1938-1939, Bronx Central Post
Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent
Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.6

FOOTNOTES

1. For a full account of the Bronx mural, see: Diana L. Linden, *Ben Shahn's New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015) chapter 3.
2. Conversation between Bernarda Bryson and author, January 28, 1993. Although the post office is landmarked, it is now a private building without ready public access.
3. David C. Ward, Dorothy Moss, and John Fagg, *The Sweat of the Faces: Portraying American Workers* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2017), 148.
4. Ben Shahn, interview with Paul Benison, October 29, 1956.
5. Philip S. Foner and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619 – 1981* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017). See chapters 14 and chapter 16 on African American workers, labor unions, and the Great Depression including Southern agriculture depicted here by Shahn.
6. Kenneth M. Price, *To Walt Whitman, America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 77.

Illustrations



Ben Shahn
We Want Peace, 1946
Offset photolithograph in colors
41 ³/₈ x 26 ⁷/₈ inches (unframed)
Collection of Warren and Andrea Grover
© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by
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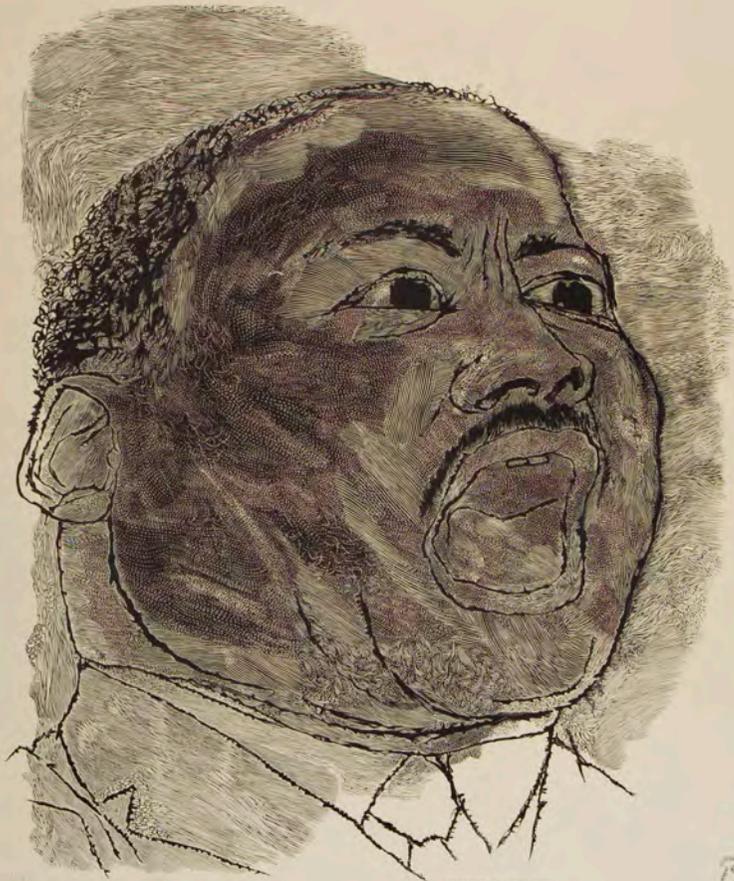


HE SAYS **NO** TO CIVILIZATION AND SURVIVAL
HE VOTED **AGAINST**
NUCLEAR TEST BAN
CIVIL RIGHTS ACT
TAX REDUCTION
MEDICAL CARE FOR THE AGED
MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION

SAY **NO** TO THE **NO-SAYER**
VOTE JOHNSON

Ben Shahn

Ben Shahn
Say No to the No-Sayer, Vote Johnson,
1964
Offset photolithograph
28 x 22 inches (unframed)
Courtesy of the Special Collections
Division, The Newark Public Library
© 2019 Estate of Ben Shahn/
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Society (ARS), NY

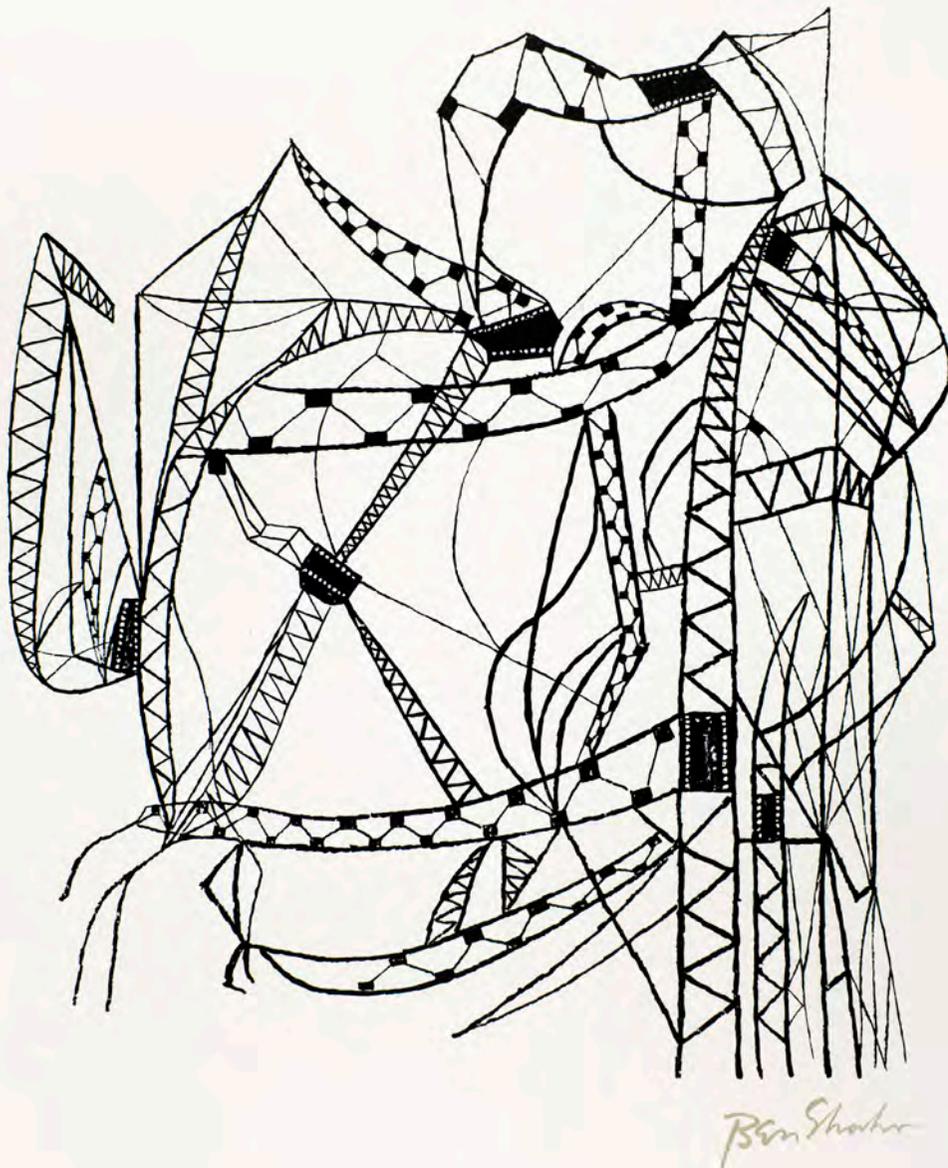


Ben Shahn

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW. WE HAVE GOT DIFFICULT DAYS AHEAD, BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER WITH ME BECAUSE I'VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP. LIKE ANYBODY ELSE I WOULD LIKE TO LIVE A LONG LIFE. BUT I'M NOT CONCERNED WITH THAT. I JUST WANT TO DO GOD'S WILL AND HE HAS ALLOWED ME TO GO UP THE MOUNTAIN. I SEE THE PROMISED LAND. I MAY NOT GET THERE WITH YOU, BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW TONIGHT THAT WE AS A PEOPLE WILL GET TO THE PROMISED LAND. I AM HAPPY TONIGHT THAT I AM NOT WORRIED ABOUT ANYTHING. I'M NOT FEARING ANY MAN. MY EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY OF THE COMING OF THE LORD."

Martin Luther King Jr.

Ben Shahn
Martin Luther King, 1968
Offset lithograph
28 x 21^{15/16} inches (unframed)
Collection of Passaic County
Community College
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Ben Shahn
I many cities from For the Sake of a Single Verse... from The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968
Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Color lithograph on Velin D'Arches paper
Edition 706 of 950
22 1/2x 17 3/4inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein
2007.5.8
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Ben Shahn

II many men from *For the Sake of a
Single Verse...* from *The Notebooks of
Malte Laurids Brigge* by Rainer Maria
Rilke, 1968

Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Color lithograph on Velin D'Arches paper

Edition 706 of 950

22 ½ x 17 ¾ inches

University Galleries Permanent
Collection

Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein

2007.5.8

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Les experts: Couard, Varinard, Belhomme, Feyssegnières

Ben Shahn

Les Experts from *The Dreyfus Affair*, 1984

Lithograph on Arches 150gm pure rag vergé
paper

Published by Crossroad Books, Cincinnati, OH

Edition 222 of 450

15 ½ x 12 inches (unframed)

University Galleries Permanent Collection

Gift of Bill Westheimer

2007.3.1

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VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Ben Shahn
Esterhazy from *The Dreyfus Affair*, 1984
Lithograph on Arches 150gm pure rag vergé
paper
Published by Crossroad Books, Cincinnati, OH
Edition 222 of 450
15 ½ x 12 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Bill Westheimer
2007.3.1
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Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, gleaner panel
of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central
Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.5



Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, textile worker
panel of *Resources of America*, 1933-1939, Bronx
Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.3

Exhibition Checklist

- Ben Shahn
Rabbi, c. 1922-23
Black ink etching on tan wove paper
10 x 8 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Jim Deutsch
1994.4.1
- Ben Shahn
This Is Nazi Brutality, 1942
Offset photolithograph in colors
37 ½ x 28 ¼ inches (unframed)
Distributed by the U.S. Office of War Information
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of William F. Williams
2002.10.1
- Ben Shahn
We French Workers Warn You, 1942
Offset photolithograph in colors
28 ¼ x 39 ¾ inches (unframed)
Collection of Warren and Andrea Grover
- Ben Shahn
We Want Peace, 1946
Offset photolithograph in colors
41 ⅜ x 26 ⅞ inches (unframed)
Collection of Warren and Andrea Grover
- Ben Shahn
Paterson, circa 1950
Watercolor on paper mounted on cardboard
32 x 23 inches (image size)
Collection of Daphne Williams Fox and the family
of William Carlos Williams
- Ben Shahn
Portrait of Monroe Wheeler, 1952
Ink on paper
18 ½ x 13 ¾ inches (unframed)
Courtesy of the New Jersey State Museum
Collection
Gift of Monroe Wheeler
FA1984.95
- Ben Shahn
Beatitude, 1955
Wood engraving on rice paper
16 x 21 inches (unframed)
Courtesy of the New Jersey State Museum
Collection
Museum Purchase
FA1968.31.2
- Ben Shahn
Say No to the No-Sayer, Vote Johnson, 1964
Offset photolithograph
28 x 22 inches (unframed)
Courtesy of the Special Collections Division,
The Newark Public Library
- Ben Shahn
Branches of Water and Desire, 1965
Serigraph
26 ½ x 21 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Bernarda Bryson
1980.1.1
- Ben Shahn
Frederick Douglass, 1965
Photo-silkscreen
Edition 218 of 250
22 x 16 ¾ inches (unframed)
Courtesy of the Special Collections Division,
The Newark Public Library
- Ben Shahn
The Cherry Tree Legend, 1967
Photolithographs of drawings and lettering on
cream wove paper
7 ¼ x 5 ½ inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Ofelia Garcia
2007.4.2
- Ben Shahn
*For the Sake of a Single Verse...from The Notebooks
of Malte Laurids Brigge by Rainer Maria Rilke*, 1968
Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Portfolio of 24 color lithographs on Velin
d'Arches paper
Edition 706 of 950
Each print 22 ½ x 17 ¾ inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein
2007.5.8
- Ben Shahn
*One must know the animals from
For the Sake of a Single Verse...*, 1968
Color lithograph
Edition 747 of 950
19 x 16 ½ inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Richard Mann
2012.8.55
- Ben Shahn
X to days of childhood from
For the Sake of a Single Verse..., 1968
Color lithograph on handmade paper
26 x 23 ¼ inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Linda Von Cino
2006.13.1
- Ben Shahn
Martin Luther King, 1968
Offset lithograph
28 x 21 15/16 inches (unframed)
Collection of Passaic County Community College
- Ben Shahn
The Dreyfus Affair, 1984
Lithographs on Arches 150gm pure rag vergé paper
Published by Crossroad Books, Cincinnati, OH
Edition 222 of 450
Each print 15 ½ x 12 inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Bill Westheimer
2007.3.1
- Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, worker
picking cotton in *Resources of America*, 1938-1939,
Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.1
- Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, Walt
Whitman in *Resources of America*, 1938-1939,
Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
5 x 7 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.2

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, Walt Whitman in *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
5 x 7 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.3

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, riveter panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.4

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, riveter and Whitman panels *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
5 x 7 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.5

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, Walt Whitman in *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
5 x 7 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.6

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, textile worker panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
5 x 7 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.7

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, gleaner panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.8

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, TVA engineer panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.9

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, female textile worker panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.10

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, cotton industry panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
7 x 5 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2014.6.11

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, cotton industry panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.1

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.2

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, textile worker panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.3

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.4

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, gleaner panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.5

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, TVA engineer panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.6

Unknown artist (possibly Bernarda Bryson)
Untitled (documentation of Ben Shahn, riveter panel of *Resources of America*, 1938-1939, Bronx Central Post Office), n.d.
Photograph
8 x 10 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Leslie Lawner
2017.4.7

Artist Biography



George Kemper
Untitled (Ben Shahn in his studio),
circa 1968-1969
Photograph
10 ½ x 13 inches
University Galleries Permanent Collection
2015.x.3

Ben Shahn (1898-1969) was perhaps the most important social-realist artist to have emerged in the early 1930s in the United States. He was a painter, photographer, printmaker, and muralist, who also had a very active career as an illustrator and graphic designer. He was born in Kovno, Lithuania, and came with his parents and younger brother to the United States, settling in Brooklyn in 1906. Between 1913 and 1917, he apprenticed in a lithography shop, where he learned typography. He attended the National Academy of Design from 1919 until 1922. He went to Europe in 1924, lived in both France and Italy, and traveled in North Africa. After a brief return to New York, he returned to France in 1927, staying until 1929. His earliest work reflects the influence of Cézanne and the painters associated with the School of Paris.

After returning to the United States in 1929, he took up social themes, concentrating on a series that focused on victims of social abuse and labor struggles, as is evident in *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1931-32), and the “Tom Mooney” series (1932-33).

His style for these works consisted of an emphatic, wiry line and expressive colors, applied with ragged brushwork. Starting in 1932, his work was exhibited at the Downtown Gallery and represented by Edith Halpert. The following year, Shahn assisted Diego Rivera in his ill-fated Rockefeller Center mural, as well as with the portable murals at the New Workers School on 14th Street, which was a Lovestonite organization. With Rivera’s mentoring, Shahn learned the fresco technique that he would utilize in the murals he painted for the WPA. Between 1935 and 1938, Shahn was a photographer for the Farm Security Administration, documenting rural life in Ohio and throughout the Midwest and the South. Years later he based a number of his paintings on photographs from this period.

As a muralist, Shahn completed major frescos during the WPA period at the public school in Roosevelt, New Jersey, the Bronx Central Post Office, and the Social Security Administration building in Washington, D.C. In 1968, his outdoor mosaic mural on the subject of Sacco and Vanzetti was installed on the campus of Syracuse University. His murals all have the ability to tell complex socio-political narratives in a straightforward, formally elegant way comparable to the work of other great muralists of the past, such as Giotto, Masaccio, and Diego Rivera.

During the immediate post-World War II period, Shahn was a graphic designer for the CIO labor union, producing a significant number of posters and graphic advertising campaigns advocating important labor issues such as living wage, safety in the workplace, and the support of pro-labor candidates for public office. Although he was partially blacklisted during the McCarthy Era, throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s Shahn was a freelance graphic designer for CBS,

and also produced illustrations for *Playboy*, *The Nation*, *American Heritage Magazine*, and Vintage paperbacks. Together with his good friend the painter Stuart Davis, he was on the faculty of the Famous Artists Correspondence School in Westport, Connecticut. Throughout his life he taught as a visiting professor at Harvard University, Washington University in St. Louis, and at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine.

Politically, Shahn evolved starting in the 1930s from a fellow traveler (close to, but never a member of the Communist Party) to an enthusiastic New Deal liberal who supported President Roosevelt. In 1948, he supported Henry Wallace for President, producing a major poster mocking both President Truman and Governor Dewey. By the 1950s,



he was back in the Democratic Party supporting Adlai Stevenson and drawing anti-Eisenhower posters. In 1965, he supported President Johnson and created a number of satirical graphics ridiculing the radicalism of Senator Goldwater, the Republican candidate. In 1968, disillusioned with the Vietnam War, he volunteered on Senator Eugene McCarthy's campaign during the Democratic primary; he produced two major posters using the dove as a peace symbol.

Starting in the mid-1930s, Shahn lived and worked in the homestead of Roosevelt, New Jersey, half an hour from Princeton. He mentored several generations of younger artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Leonard Baskin, Bernard Perlin, Peter Paone, and James Kearns. Shahn died of heart failure in a New York City hospital in 1969. His second wife, the painter and illustrator Bernarda Bryson outlived him into the twenty-first century, living to almost 100 years of age.

His legacy as one of the leading artists of social protest within the twentieth century art remains undisputed.

— Alejandro Anreus, PhD

Ben Shahn
XVII memories of many nights of love
from *For the Sake of a Single Verse...*
from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*
by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968
Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Color lithograph on Velin d'Arches paper
Edition 706 of 950
22 ½ x 17 ¾ inches (unframed)
University Galleries Permanent Collection
Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein
2007.5.8
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This publication accompanies the exhibition, *The World Through My Eyes: Celebrating the Legacy of Ben Shahn*, on view at the William Paterson University Galleries September 9 – December 11, 2019.

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University Galleries

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY



Ben Shahn

Ben Shahn

*XI the parents one had to hurt from
For the Sake of a Single Verse...from
The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge
by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1968*

Published by Atelier Mourlot, New York
Color lithograph on Velin d'Arches paper
Edition 706 of 950

22 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches (unframed)

University Galleries Permanent Collection

Gift of Dr. Irwin Goldstein

2007.5.8

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