
The exhibition catalog Joe Jones: Radical Painter of the American Scene resulted from an intensive four-year research project on the Saint Louis artist. Focusing on Jones’s career and life during the Great Depression, the catalog accompanies the exhibition at the Saint Louis Museum of Art curated by Andrew Walker, Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs and Curator of American Art and Janeen Turk, Senior Curatorial Assistant.

Walker and Turk propose to “tell the story of one of Missouri’s most important twentieth-century artists and convey his significant contribution to American art.” The five accompanying essays explore Jones’s career from 1930 to 1942. The discussion opens with the artist’s early success as a modernist painter in Saint Louis during the 1930s. Jones’s work underwent a radical change with his political and social engagement with the Communist Party and subsequent development of his “worker-artist identity in opposition to the elitism of the art world.” He continued his practice of visualizing social protest with government-sponsored trips to the Dust Bowl, where he captured the devastation of farmers and the landscape. Jones briefly participated with the burgeoning art colony of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, but eventually relocated to New York, where he achieved greater prominence and recognition. The catalog concludes with a discussion of his New Deal Art Program commission to create post office murals in Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri.

In the past, Jones’s life and career has not received the analysis and study this catalog provides. Additionally, the artist has had scant representation in major exhibitions since the 1963 memorial retrospective by The Selected Artists Galleries, New York. This exhibition rectifies this. The catalog’s inclusion of archival documents, family photographs, and letters build a complete picture of Jones’s artistic practice and social activism during the Great Depression. One of the highlights is the illustrative section following the essays that includes eighty-three plates of Jones’s lithographs, paintings, and photographs, many reproduced full-page size.

This comprehensive exhibition catalog brings Jones’s prolific career to the attention of current scholarship thereby acknowledging his stature within the American art scene of the twentieth-century. Expertly published, indexed with references, and containing a detailed and substantive chronology, this work is recommended for the academic or museum library with an interest in American art.

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