

Artist's Union of New York 1933-1942

4 Main New Deal Art Projects:

Public Works of Art Project (1933-34)

Treasury Section of Fine Arts (1934-43)

Treasury Relief Art Project (1935-38)

WPA Federal Art Project (1935-43)

New Deal:

1933

May Federal Emergency Relief Administration begins

Nov 1933-Mar. 1934 Public Works of Art Project
-artists selected by competition
-700 murals, 7,000 paintings, 750 sculptures, 2,500 prints

1934

Sept. 1934 Treasury Section of Fine Arts begins
-artists selected by competition
-from 1934-43 produced 1,116 murals, 301 sculptures

1935

May Work Projects Administration and the Federal Art Project begin
-operated on the principle of relief
-decentralized and operated on a regional basis
-activity concentrated disproportionately in NY
-2,500 murals, 108,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 200,000 prints, 2 million posters, and 23,000 historic records for the Index of American Design

July 6 National Labor Relations Act 1935
-act creates the National Labor Relations Board
-set up to judge labor disputes and enforce labor law

July Treasury Relief Art Project begins
-administrators try to avoid principle of relief
-hire artists very selectively, often do not use their entire budget
-89 mural and sculpture projects. 10,000 easel paintings and prints.

The Artists Union

1933

Summer Formation of the Unemployed Artists Group (UAG) by members of the John Reed Club

October 27 First public appearance of the Unemployed Artist Group at a meeting for unemployed artists organized by the College Art Association. Phil Bard calls for the state to pay a living wage to all artists and allow them to work in their own studios. Frederick Daniels of the New York State Temporary Relief Administration states that funds will be provided for relief work for artists.

Late October UAG puts out a public call for artists to join its ranks.

Nov UAG drafts a proposal for federal sponsorship of the Visual Arts. This proposal anticipates that eventually adopted by WPA art projects.

December UAG presents a petition to Harry Hopkins of the Civil Works Administration
-artists should be given teaching, mural painting, easel painting, commercial and applied arts jobs

December	Establishment of Public Works of Art Project under the Treasury Department -Juliana Force, Director of the Whitney is appointed as regional director for NY. Though directed to provide relief, Whitney Director Juliana Force insists on recruiting artists on the basis of quality over need.
December 28	Bernanda Bryson leads a delegation of 50 artists to confront Juliana Force. Force replies that she selects the best. "Need is not in my vocabulary"
1934	
January-March	UAG pickets the Whitney Museum
January	Juliana Force starts hiring artists from the UAG
February	The Unemployed Artists Group renames itself the Artists Union By this time the Union was a lively gathering place for artists. Wednesday night meetings draw hundreds of artists. The Union deals with grievances, formalizes membership, organizes dances, exhibitions and lectures.
Spring	Juliana Force closes Whitney Museum early due to Artists Union protests
March	Public Works of Art Project winds down.
May 9	A sister organization to the Artists Union, the Artists Committee of Action demonstrates at City Hall for an artist-run Municipal Arts Center.
July 6	Mayor LaGuardia creates a 'committee of 100', essentially a panel of wealthy art patrons to investigate creating a Municipal Arts Center.
Autumn 1	Artists Union membership passes 700. Membership doubles following the start of WPA Federal Art Projects
October 26	About 1000 artists meet to pass a resolution calling for: Municipal Arts Center Extension of work relief for artists Endorsement by the mayor of the Federal Art Project
December 15	Union marches on the offices of the College Art Association to demand more relief employment. The CAA's director, Audrey McMahon now administers the Federal Art Project in New York.
1935	
1934-35	Most demonstrations are aimed at Audrey McMahon, director of the College Art Association who is put in charge of the New York section of the Federal Art Project. The Union and McMahon develop a collegial relationship, working together to shape the project. Union pressure is often used by McMahon as a tool to solicit increased funding from Washington.
Spring	Artists Union approaches AFL (American Federation of Labor) regarding affiliation, but is rejected. Less than 400 Union Members are working on city art projects. The majority are unemployed. The Union develops the concept for a Federal Art Bill providing for permanent government sponsorship of the arts.
August 1	Works Project Administration begins
August 10	Union protests pay cut under WPA administration Bernanda Bryce leaves the Union and its magazine Art Front, sick of attempts by the Communist Party to control the Union.
September 12	Union pickets Daily Mirror offices for calling artists "hobohemians and boondoglers"
Fall	Artists Union membership at ~1300 Of 1,800 artists employed nationally by the WPA, 1,210 were in NYC.
November	WPA rules that only people on relief can be employed on Federal Art Projects Artists must go undergo stringent means test to qualify for relief.

December City announces the opening of a Municipal Art Gallery
The Union threatens a boycott when it learns that non-citizens will not be permitted to exhibit, and that the administration can censor exhibitions. The Union wins.

1936

November 1935-March 1936 Almost continuous protest by the Artists Union against possible cutbacks in the WPA

March 6 Washington calls halt to further employment on WPA projects.

April 13th 250 artists invade Audrey McMahon's offices at the College Art Association to present a petition to increase employment on the Federal Art Project.

May 13th 37 unemployed artists sit-in at College Art Association offices.

December Arrest of 219 artists occupying Art Project Offices. Many artists beaten.
Largest NYC arrest at that time. Appalled by violence, Mayor LaGuardia gives order for police to restrain themselves in future confrontations with the Artists Union

1937

January Working with the Artists Union, Congressman William Sirovich, of the Lower East Side introduces a bill calling for a Department of Science, Art and Literature.
The bill never makes it to the floor of the house.

April President and congress agree on a 25% reduction of WPA projects.

Spring General paring down of WPA projects.
Artists escape the cuts, partly due to militant tactics.

All out campaign against cuts to cultural projects under the WPA. Allied with music, and theatre groups the union enlists endorsements from prominent figures, congressmen. Asks that the Federal Art Project be exempted from the general order reducing quotas because artists are the least likely to benefit from an improvement in the economy.

June 27 Pink slips issued as WPA attempts to reduce roles. The next day 60 artists barricade themselves inside the Federal Art Project offices. A delegation of dismissed workers travels to Washington and demands a meeting with WPA chief Harry Hopkins. 600 more artists invade the Arts Project offices, and 250 Theatre Project workers sit-in at the Theatre Projects offices. Two New York Arts Project officials are held hostage overnight until they promise to accede to Union demands.

End of July 1937 Despite Union protests 25% cut achieved to the Federal Art Project.
Administrators concede this is the most they could cut given Union pressure.

1938

January Artist Union affiliates with the CIO as the United American Artists, Local 60 of the United Office and Professional Workers.
The new local offices are less conducive to the bohemian atmosphere of the Artists Union. Local 60 is not fond of artists 'unconventionality'.

1939

Spring Congress begins in earnest to try and shut down the Federal Arts Project.
From this point on the Union is fighting a defensive battle to continue the Federal Art Project.

1938-1940 Congressional witch-hunts including investigations into the Federal Theatre Project

May 1942 Artists Union leaves the CIO and joins with the remains of the American Artists Congress to form the Artists League of America. This is essentially the end of the Artists Union

That the highest wages in the WPA were paid to artists, that a large percentage of the Federal Art Project quota was awarded to NYC, and that stringent relief requirements were relaxed were all result of pressure by organized artists.

Art Worker's Coalition Timeline

1968

- Fall Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis meet with curator Allan Schoener to protest the exclusion of black artists from the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition, *Harlem on My Mind*.
- Nov 17 Romare Bearden, Jean Hutson and Benny Andrews organize a protest against the Met Museum and *Harlem on My Mind*
- Nov Initial planning meetings begin for the Art Workers Coalition: Takis, Wen-Ying Tsai, Hans Haacke, Len Lye, Tom Lloyd, Willoughby Sharp, John Perrault, and Gregory Battcock

1969

- Jan 3 Takis Vassilakis and friends remove Takis's Sculpture *Tele-Sculpture (1960)* from *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Before guards could intervene Takis and friends lifted work off of pedestal, pulled down the two overhead revolving forms and carried the parts to the museum's garden. The exhibition curator had shown the piece against the artist's will, and installed it poorly. Artist and supporters met w/ director Bates Lowry for an hour.
- Jan 9 The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) forms in Benny Andrews studio
- Jan 12 The BECC picket *Harlem on My Mind* at the Met Museum
- Jan 28 Art Worker's Coalition (AWC) releases *13 Points*, a statement of principles and demands
AWC and BECC membership begins to overlap
- Jan 28 AWC members propose open hearings at the MoMA.
- Feb 14 MoMA director Bates Lowry counter-proposes hearings with a 'special committee on artist relations'.
- Mar 22 AWC protests at MoMA for free admission
- Mar 30 AWC protests MoMA in lobby and pickets
-free admission
-a Martin Luther King Jr. wing for Black and Puerto-Rican artists
-extension of the museum into city communities, including communities of colour
- Apr 13 Black and Puerto Rican students assemble in MoMA auditorium to evaluate if the MoMA is 'doing it's job' in representing art by artists of colour
- Apr 14 AWC hosts an Open Hearing at the School for the Visual Arts. Audience of 250 hears 50 speakers. Remarks collected and distributed as pamphlet *Open Hearings*
- April 24, BECC meets with Whitney director John I. H. Baur and other administrators of the Whitney to discuss its professed commitment to representing artists of all races, prompted by the Whitney exhibition *The 1930's: Painting and Sculpture in America* (October 15–December 1, 1968) which excluded black artists.
- April BECC meet with representatives from MoMA to discuss the exclusion of Black artists in a memorial exhibition for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,

AWC weekly meetings at the *Museum Space* co-op gallery.
- May 31 Bates Lowry resigns as director of the MoMA
- May 22 Art Strike Against War, Racism and Repression
One day strike of art museums and galleries. Robert Morris close his solo exhibition at the Whitney two weeks early to concentrate on political activity, as did artists showing at the Jewish Museum. Most New York art museums closed, with the exception of the Met, which was picketed, and the MoMA, which instead declared free admission and extended hours for the day.
- June El Museum Del Barrio founded by artist Rafael Ortiz with funding from the Board of Education
- Oct 15 Vietnam Moratorium Day in protest of the Vietnam war. The MoMA, Whitney, and Jewish Museum close to protest the Vietnam War. The Guggenheim and Met are picketed by the AWC for remaining open.
- Oct 31 Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) remove Kasimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition* from the wall at MoMA and replace it with a manifesto

- Nov 10 GAAG performs *Bloodbath* at MoMA
- Dec 26 AWC Publishes "And Babies Too" anti-vietnam war poster. Supported by MoMA's staff, and originally to be produced with the collaboration of the museum, the MoMA board vetoed the museum's involvement, and the poster was produced by the AWC independently.
- 1969 Taller Boricua founded in East Harlem. Marco Dimas, Adrián Garcia, Manuel "Neco" Otero, Armando Soto are some of the founders
- 1970
- Jan 8 GAAG perform a service for the dead of Vietnam in front of Picasso's *Guernica*, using the "and babies too" poster.
- Feb the MoMA institutes "free days" in direct response to the AWC
- AWC unsuccessfully attempt to petition Picasso to remove *Guernica* from MoMA to protest the Vietnam war. They are systematically undermined by the MoMA administration.
- May 1 John Hightower takes over as MoMA director. John Hightower is the former executive director of the New York State Council on the Arts
- May 2 BECC protest at MoMA
- May 22 Art Strike. Met Museum director Thomas Hoving's office is invaded.
- May Faith Ringold, Rafael Ortiz and members of the Puerto Rican Art Worker's Coalition (PAWC) meet with Metropolitan Museum director Thomas Hoving to discuss how the museum can hire African American and Puerto Rican arts professionals, exhibit works by women and minority artists, and develop mechanisms to make the museum accessible to underserved audiences, such as co-sponsoring exhibitions at El Museo del Barrio and the Studio Museum of Harlem.
- both Women Artists in Revolution and The Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee, former subgroups of AWC begin to focus on their own activities, removing energy from AWC.
- 1971
- Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky write the Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement
- PASTA (the Professional Administrative and Staff Association) staff union forms at the MoMA
- Feb Tom Lloyd establishes the Storefront Museum in Jamaica Queens
- April Whitney curator Robert Doty organizes the exhibition *Contemporary Black Art in America* (April 6–May 16, 1971), which included 58 Black men and women artists. Ten works from the exhibition were bought during and shortly after the exhibition. Because many of their demands were not met, however, the BECC led protests against the Whitney during the exhibition
- May AWC protests the cancellation of Hans Haake's solo exhibition at the Guggenheim. This is the last large action by the Art Worker's Coalition
- the Metropolitan Museum of Art hires Irvine MacManus, of Puerto Rican descent, to join the museum's community outreach and education department. MacManus was instrumental in building a working relationship for the Metropolitan Museum with El Museo del Barrio.
- 1972
- Met Museum hires African American Curator Lowery Stokes Sims and institutes the Community Programs Department.
- A.I.R. Gallery founded

PASTA: The Professional and Administrative Staff Association of MoMA

1971	<p>PASTA forms. Local 1 of the Distributive Workers of America. Some credit is given to the Art Worker's Coalition for inspiring MoMA staff to unionize.</p> <p>53 staff dismissed during collective bargaining, due to budget cuts</p>
Aug 20-Sept 4	<p>First PASTA strike</p> <p>PASTA convinces trustees not to increase entrance fees for seniors</p> <p>PASTA prevents board from closing MoMA library</p>
1972	<p>John Hightower leaves directorship. He is replaced by Richard Oldenberg</p>
1973	
June 30	<p>Contract expires</p>
October	<p>PASTA Strike October 8-December</p> <p>Issues Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-starting wage-sabbaticals and educational benefits-right for higher level curatorial staff to join PASTA-poor and unfair organization of museum pension plan-staff representation on board and trustee committees-proposals to increase museum membership-high staff turnover due to low wages
1973-2000	<p>PASTA and the MoMA settle into a cycle of contract negotiations every 3 years. No strikes, though occasional small actions. PASTA makes gains in wages and benefits.</p>
1980	<p>Affiliates with the United Auto Workers. PASTA eventually becomes part of UAW Local 2110, which represents academic and non-profit workplaces. The majority of the locals members are women.</p>
1995	<p>Glenn Lowry is hired as MoMA Director</p>
1997	<p>MoMA begins gearing up for a major expansion. During renovations the Museum will be closed, with some of the collection exhibited in its Long Island City storage facility. MoMA staff are concerned about layoffs.</p>
2000	
April 28-Sept 10	<p>PASTA goes on strike.</p> <p>Rob Batterman is the MOMA lawyer</p> <p>Issues include: wages, health benefits, severance package, agency shop, and the right for staff laid off due to the upcoming expansion to be re-hired once the museum returns to its 53rd st. location.</p>
April 30	<p>Museum cuts off staff health benefits</p>
May 1	<p>Museum institutes free lunches for staff who do not strike</p>
Sept 10	<p>Agreement reached. PASTA Achieves agency shop. (all staff who work in titles represented by PASTA now pay union dues)</p>
2002-2004	<p>Museum located at Queens facility while 53rd st location undergoes expansion. 50 staff laid off. MoMA's film archive is permanently put into storage in Pennsylvania.</p>
2008	<p>MoMA locks out union dining room workers, bring in non-union contractor, Sevico. Dining room workers and PASTA protest.</p>
June 2, 2015	<p>One day protest outside of 'Party in the Garden' fund raiser. Museum proposes increases in staff contributions to healthcare premiums. Contract achieved w/out strike.</p>

The 2000's: Teamsters Local 814, Occupy Museums, Occupy Arts and Labor

2004	1st Sotheby's lockout, Union forced to accept concessions
2008	Supported by Teamsters for a Democratic Union, rank and file successfully organize to negotiate a better contract at Sotheby's
2009	
October	Local 814 elects reform slate including many of the Sotheby's workers who organized for a better contract in 2008
2011	
July	Local 814 contract with Sotheby's expires
August 1	Sotheby's locks out 43 Teamsters art handlers, replacing them with temp staff and non-union contractors
August 26	Teamsters begin to protest outside Sotheby's
September 17	Occupy Wall Street begins
September 22	Occupy protesters infiltrate and disrupt Sotheby's Post-war and contemporary art sale, standing up and delivering statements during the auction
September 27	Teamsters protest Metropolitan Museum 'Diversity Gala'. The Met Museum shares two board members with Sotheby's: Michel David-Weill and Carroll Petrie.
October 12	Occupy protesters infiltrate a Sotheby's sale of contemporary and impressionist art, again delivering statements during the auction. This time with air horns.
October 13	Local 814 members travel to London to protest lockout with London unions.
October 14	Occupy protesters protest at Union Street Cafe, owned by Danny Meyer, a Sotheby's trustee.
November	Occupy protesters support Teamsters on pickets during major auctions.
December 1	Art Handlers confront Sotheby's board member and domestic partner of Mayor Bloomberg, Diane Taylor at a meeting of the Hudson River Park Trust. Taylor famously states, "I have only one thing to say to you. I have had one conversation with (Sotheby's CEO) Bill Ruprecht about this, and I told him that if he accedes to any of your demands, I will resign from the board."
2012	
January 17	Occupy Museums conducts a 2 hour action at the MoMA in solidarity with Sotheby's workers. MoMA shares directors with Sotheby's. Protestors facilitate a discussion within the Diego Rivera exhibition and do a banner drop.
February 4	Union activists attend University of Vermont board of trustees meeting. (Sotheby's CEO William Ruprecht is a University trustee)
February 27	Unknown activists release fake press release and website: "Whitney Biennial 2012 to Open March 1; Museum Breaks With Two Corporate Sponsors, Apologizes to Participating Artists" In the mock press release the Whitney apologizes for having accepted sponsorship from Sotheby's, still engaged in a lockout with it's workers, and Deutschebank, a major actor in the foreclosure crisis.
Feb 29	Invited guests to the opening of the Whitney Biennial bring Teamsters workers and activists as their guests. Art handlers and protesters deliver statements from the performance stage.
April	Sotheby's switches lawyers, from Jackson Lewis to Bob Batterman
May 2	Sotheby's sells a pastel version of Edvard Munch's "The Scream" for \$119 million. Teamsters and Occupy protest outside.
June 1	Sotheby's Art Handlers go back to work. Agreement includes wage boosts, and retains worker's benefits.

Frieze Art Fair: District Council of Carpenters, Teamsters, IATSE, Occupy Arts and Labor

2012

London-based Frieze Art Fair came to New York for the first time in May 2012. It uses the events company Production Glue to produce the fair, and unlike other art fairs and business expositions in NYC, uses non-union labor to build the fair. When unions attempt to contact Frieze head office, the organization won't return their phone calls.

April 13 District Council of Carpenters begin picketing Deutschebank's building at 60 Wall St. Deutschebank is a sponsor of Frieze.

May 4-7 Frieze Art Fair. Unions picket the Frieze Art Fair at Randall's Island

Winter 2012-2013 Unions begin political campaign to push Frieze to use union labor.

2013

April 17 Unions hold joint press conference with city councillors Mark Weprin and Melissa Mark-Viverito on the steps of City Hall. Mark-Viverito's district, District 8, included Randall's Island and has one of the lowest median incomes in the city.

April 17 Arts & Labor issues a statement of support to Teamsters Joint Council 16, IATSE Local 829, IATSE Local 1 and District Council 9 of Painters to demand that Frieze hire union and local labor.

April 18 Art publisher Paper Monument withdraws from the fair.

May 1 Arts and Labor and the Rude Mechanical Orchestra make a visit to the Frieze NY offices.

May 6 Arts & Labor issued a letter to participating artists, galleries and attendees, along with panelists speaking at Frieze New York programs. A handful of members from the arts community contact the Frieze organizers in support of union demands.

May 10-13 Frieze Art Fair. Unions picket Deutschebank and Randall's Island.

May 9 With the blessing of her dealers, artist Andrea Bowers placed a letter criticizing Frieze's labor practices next to her work. Overnight a security guard removes the letter. Next day it is replaced.

May 10 Nato Thompson and Suzanne Lacy give Teamsters and Arts and Labor 10 minutes during their panel to deliver statements. At the last minute Teamsters are not permitted to speak, and Arts and Labor activists deliver their statements for them.

May 11 Arts and Labor and 99 pickets conducted a series of direct actions inside the fair, including leafleting, mic checks, and the donning of rat masks

September Arts and Labor begins outreach to arts and community groups surrounding Randall's Island

October 3 City councillor Melissa Mark-Viverito convenes a parks permit hearing with an emphasis on Frieze. Mark-Viverito represents District 8 which is home to Randall's Island. Teamsters and Carpenter unions testify.

November Mayor Bill DeBlasio elected. Melissa Mark-Viverito is appointed speaker.

2014

January Teamsters reach out to Randall's Island Park Alliance to inquire the status of Community Board involvement and timing of permits. Frieze hires Capalino & Company to represent them in discussion with Unions.

February Frieze and Unions begin negotiations

April 9 Frieze announces it will hire partial union labor for 2014, and full union labor for 2015 and 2016.