

Arts & Culture

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Rochester Murals Included in WPA Art Film

By [VERONICA VOLK](#) (/PEOPLE/VERONICA-VOLK)

Two Rochester Murals are to be featured in an upcoming art film.

The film focuses on works created under FDR's Works Progress Administration. The New Deal agency put many skilled and unskilled laborers back to work on government payroll.

Rochester native Carl Peters was hired to paint two murals for Madison High School, which was torn down in the 1980's. But the paintings, and their messages, remain.

"Life of Action" and "Life of Contemplation" are each 22 feet high.

Filmmaker Michael Maglaras says they reflect the attitudes of the time.

" 'Life of Action' is all about the reconstruction of America, putting people back to work. It is filled with scenes, primarily of men working, you know, creating opportunities for jobs."

He says "Life of Action" is also, in many ways, a call to action.

"There is a very central figure in the center of the mural itself, who clearly is an architect, and before him is a blank canvas that he's pointing to, and he's essentially suggesting that anyone looking at this mural, in this case presumably high school kids, would see that although all these men are working in 'Life of Action,' that the future is a blank page."

The other mural, "Life of Contemplation," is about Americans using their intellect to rise above their challenges and circumstances.

" 'Life of Contemplation' is a more lyrical piece... It's about about cerebral side of our rebuilding as a country during the Depression. It's about learning, it's about books, it's about education."

Maglaras says the murals, which seem to mirror each other, explain that it takes both of these particular strengths to rebuild a nation. Much of the art work commissioned in this time, and featured in Maglaras' film, have similar themes of rebuilding, restoring, and overcoming.



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wxxi/files/201502/thumbnail.png>)

A figure in Peters' mural "Life of Action" points to a blank canvas.



Peters' murals, "Life of Action" (Left) and "Life of Contemplation" (Right)

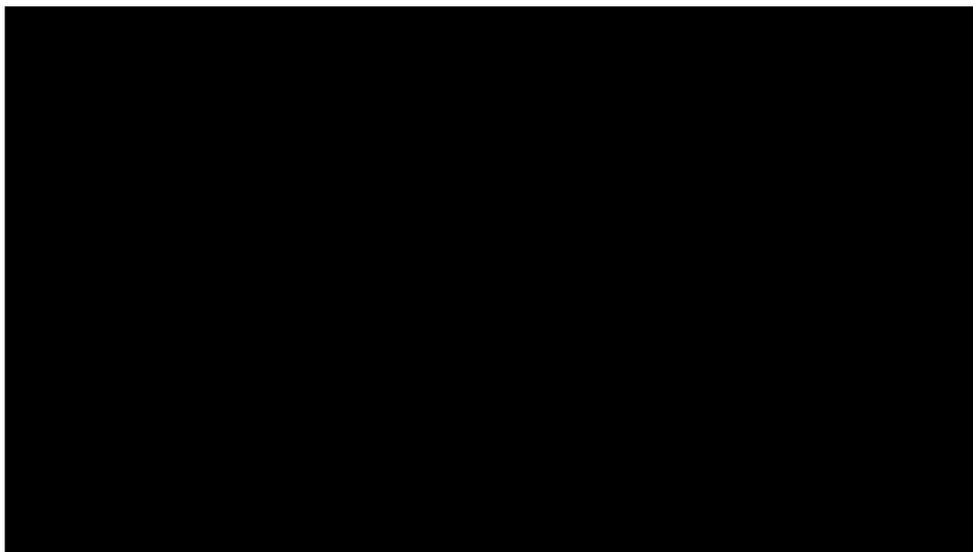
According to Maglaras, the paintings also include Rochester residents.

"In fact, Carl Peters used a number of Madison High students and teachers in both these murals and you can see that that's the case when you look closely at the work."

Both murals are on display at the Wilson Magnet School, but they are behind glass. Maglaras says it was a painstaking process to photograph them, but thanks to a collaboration with the gallery and Fotowerks, the paintings will be able to appear in his upcoming film.

The film is called, "*Enough to Live On: The Arts of the WPA.*" The film commemorates the 80th anniversary of the agency and the artists who were employed by it.

Here's a segment of the film featuring the murals and the photography process used to capture them:



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