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Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, Artists' Equity Association - Printed Material, 1949-2002

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Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 81st CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION
[---]

Artists Equity

EXTENSION OF REMARKS
OF
HON. CHARLES A. PLUMLEY
OF VERMONT
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, June 16, 1949

Mr. PLUMLEY. Mr. Speaker, friends of mine, as to whose 100-percent loyalty as American citizens there can be no question, certainly not in my mind, feel aggrieved at certain statements which have appeared in the RECORD concerning the Artists Equity Association; to which remarks they take exception.

They insist they have a right to their day in court before the forum of public opinion as it is reached by the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

With this statement I agree. Therefore I sought to obtain some information relative to the subject matter of their complaints, in order that they might be assured their "day in court."

Under permission heretofore granted I am therefore including the following letter from Hudson D. Walker, executive director of Artists Equity Association:

ARTISTS EQUITY ASSOCIATION,
New York, N. Y., May 6, 1949.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE PLUMLEY: I am happy to have the opportunity to write you about Artists Equity Association in response to your request.

We believe that any organization which seeks the support and confidence of the American people, owes them, and their elected representatives, a full and frank disclosure of its objectives, its methods of operation and its program.

Acting on that conviction, I am pleased that you have taken the trouble to seek me out for relevant information about Artists Equity. Be assured that the association, which has already made its program and activities as widely known as possible within our limited means, will be happy to furnish any additional material you may desire.



The formation of the association has been condemned in some quarters, regrettably on the floor of the House of Representatives, as a novel and dangerous departure from the traditional pattern of American social and economic organization. It has been alleged that the participation of artists, without regard to their personal political beliefs, in an organization formed to better their economic and artistic position is an alien practice, foreign to American concepts.

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The criticism and condemnation of the association is not in accordance with the facts.

The organization of persons in the professions, united by a common interest, for the advancement of their own and the general welfare, are an established part of our national life. The most cursory study of history discloses that the organization of professional persons—lawyers, doctors, teachers and almost all of the other professions—is almost coincident with the founding of the Republic. The activity of such groups, as well as the activity of such organized groups as labor, farmers and businessmen, has had profound and beneficial effects essential to the functioning of our democratic society.

Experience has taught the artists of this country that they cannot discharge their obligations to their calling and improve their general welfare as individuals. They have found it necessary to band together, much in the same way as have writers, musicians and actors. The Artists Equity Association, formed by leaders in the profession during March 1947, in organization and basic approach was modeled after the Author's League of America. We sought, and continue to seek, ways and means to bring about the kind of economic security for artists as has been attained for writers by the Author's League.

Our membership takes no cognizance of either the political or esthetic views of its members. These matters we feel to be beyond the scope of the association. It is not now, nor do I believe it will ever be, considered the province of the association to control the political thinking of its members or to impose any official artistic approach. The sole qualification for membership in the association is technical competence to the degree that the applicant is engaged in the art on a professional basis and has had proper recognition.

Despite the effort made to brand the association as an organization engaged in activities outside of its stated economic purpose, its only concern since its inception has been to do those things which, in the opinion of its membership, will serve to further their economic well-being and to bring about a wider appreciation of the graphic arts by as large a section of the general public as possible.

It is impossible in the confines of this letter to give you in detail the scope of the work of the association. However, a few highlights may be of interest.

The association has paid considerable attention to a reexamination of the relationship of the artist to the dealer, exploring such aspects of the relationship as equitable commissions, representation, frequency of exhibits, and the pricing of art to the buying public.

The association is also much concerned with the relationship of the artist to the museum. While the association is concerned with the immediate benefits for its members, it also believes that there are long-range objectives which should be pursued with equal vigor. It wishes above all to help American painting and sculpture to achieve its fullest development, and to that end, feels that a constantly enlarging audience is of first importance. Because of this, the association has instituted a program designed to stimulate the exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture in the museums of the country. The response of directors and curators to this program has been extremely gratifying, the directors of the major museums of the country having agreed to participate in a joint program with the association to the end that contemporary painting and sculpture will be seen by a wider audience than heretofore.

Another problem of great concern to the association has been the improvement of the economic situation of the artist. The average annual income of the professional artist in this country is shockingly low. While the long-range objective of this association is to increase the artist's income through a wider distribution and sale of his product, in the meantime the association has established a welfare fund to try to meet some of the acute emergency problems which much and do arise.

These are but a few of the major objectives of the association. In addition, it supplies counsel on such matters as copyright law, reproduction fees, professional ethics, and related matters. As clear from the foregoing, the association is primarily and exclusively a professional association devoted to improving the economic situation of its membership. I want to stress again that the association has no political affiliation or political intent. Correspondingly, we do not feel it to be our right to attempt to interfere in the political or aesthetic affairs of our membership. We have operated on the principle that these matters are exclusively the concern of the individual.

On behalf of the officers and members of Equity, I wish to express our gratitude to you for the opportunity of making this statement.

Sincerely yours,
HUDSON D. WALER,
Executive Director.

Accompanying the above letter was enclosed an informative statement, which follows:

STATEMENT

Twice during the month of March, Representative DONDERO, of Michigan, spoke at

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