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Archives of American Art

Mel Casas papers: Writings by Others, "Mexican and Chicano Workers in Visual Arts" by Shifra M. Goldman, 1982

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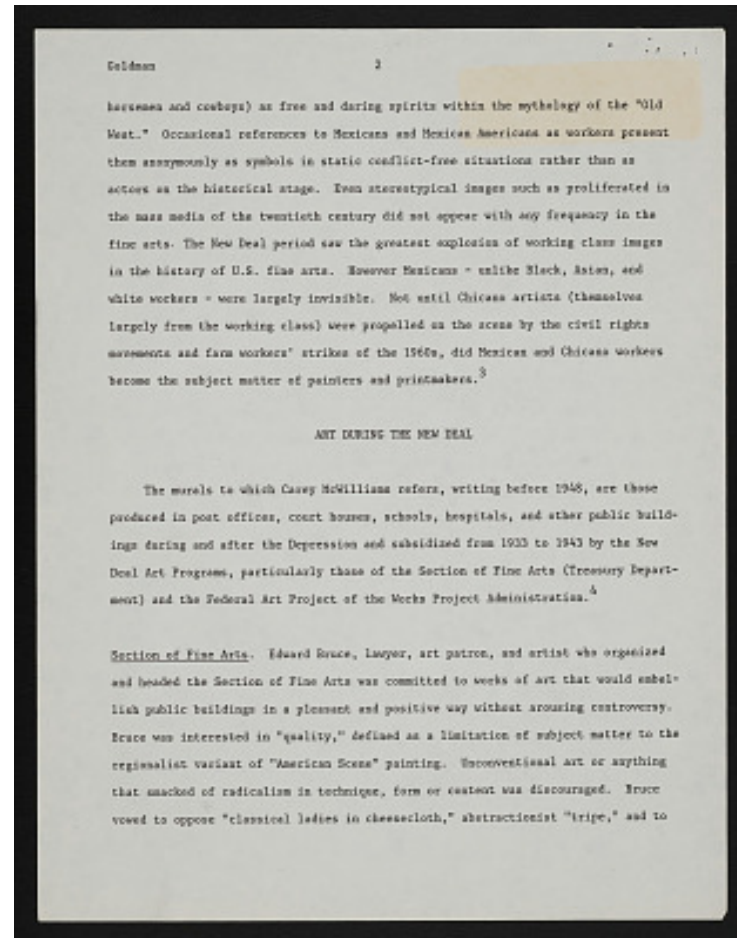
Goldman
2

horseman and cowboys) as free and daring spirits within the mythology of the "Old West." Occasional references to Mexicans and Mexican Americans as workers present them anonymously as symbols in static conflict-free situations rather than as actors on the historical stage. Even stereotypical images such as proliferated in the mass media of the twentieth century did not appear with any frequency in the fine arts. The New Deal period saw the greatest explosion of working class images in the history of U.S. fine arts. However Mexicans - unlike Black, Asian, and white workers - were largely invisible. Not until Chicano artists (themselves largely from the working class) were propelled on the scene by the civil rights movements and farm workers' strikes of the 1960s, did Mexican and Chicano workers become the subject matter of painters and printmakers.³

ART DURING THE THE NEW DEAL

The murals to which Carey McWilliams refers, writing before 1948, are those produced in post offices, court houses, schools, hospitals, and other public buildings during and after the Depression and subsidized from 1933 to 1943 by the New Deal Art Programs, particularly those of the Section of Fine Arts (Treasury Department) and the Federal Art Project of the Works Project Administration.⁴

Section of Fine Arts. Edward Bruce, lawyer, art patron, and artist who organized and headed the Section of Fine Arts was committed to works of art that would embellish public buildings in a pleasant and positive way without arousing controversy. Bruce was interested in "quality," defined as a limitation of subject matter to the regionalist variant of "American Scene" painting. Unconventional art or anything that smacked of radicalism in technique, form or content was discouraged. Bruce vowed to oppose "classical ladies in cheesecloth," abstractionist "tripe," and to



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