

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

FOR RELEASE
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Paintings by American Artists
Submitted in the Competition Conducted by the
Section of Fine Arts
for the
American National Red Cross
On Exhibition at the National Gallery of Art
May 2 - June 2, 1942.

" THE ARTISTS LOOK AT THE RED CROSS

" We all think that we know what the Red Cross does - at home, abroad, and in all places where people are face to face with an emergency. But whether we remember, through hearsay or experience, that ships are loaded with Red Cross boxes for the soldiers far away and that planes fly Red Cross medical supplies, whether we know that in the United States alone there are 3,742 Chapters of the Red Cross and that its activities continue year in and year out in every state in the Union, whether we have attended first-aid classes, surgical dressing groups, worked in canteens, driven ambulances to civilian and military hospitals, there is still much that the artist can clarify for us.

This exhibition is made up of paintings, drawings, and prints purchased by the Red Cross on the advice of a jury composed of G. Stewart Brown, Charles Coiner, Olin Dows, Mildred Holzhauser, Edward B. Rowan and Forbes Watson and of pictures recommended by this jury for exhibition. The competition from which the exhibition was selected was conducted by the Section of Fine Arts of the Public Buildings Administration, F. W. A. It is an excellent example of what artists can do when they set out to make a record of humanitarian activities. The fact that the competition was limited to Red Cross subjects seems not to have interfered with the individual points of view of competing artists. To take a few examples illustrating widely diverse subject matter and treatment.

There is a painting of the "Burma Road" in which a powerful Red Cross truck is seen in the foreground climbing a precipitous foothill. In the background the famous winding, difficult road, a feat of engineering to make, and a feat of driving skill to traverse, winds through the mountains. Three transport planes fly over the mountains where no habitations are visible -- only the endless ribbon of the road.

Looking through the exhibition we see a doctor opening

a refrigerator where the treasured blood bank is stored. In another painting a Red Cross doctor and nurse are treating a native in the tropics. In a series of delicate pen and ink drawings the simple unheroic but necessary activities of volunteers packing boxes, making bandages - are sympathetically observed.

In drawings of a totally different character, the artist makes his observations with penetrating or kindly humor. A young lady lying on her back, the victim of a first-aid class, nonchalantly puffs at her cigarette. We see convalescent sailors very happy at having an attractive nurse sit and chat with them a while. We see Red Cross supplies being delivered to the ski troops of the far north.

Wherever the Red Cross goes and whatever it does, these pictures bring home to us, as no words can, a sense of human helpfulness, of unselfish devotion to others, of courage and generosity. This is what the artists set out to do. The reason of their success is, in part, because through the democratic system of the open competition all artists were eligible and in part because the approach of the artists is neither sentimental nor conventional.

The exhibition is held through the courtesy of the Trustees of the National Gallery of Art.

Forbes Watson

Section of Fine Arts "