

HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR THE UNITED  
STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

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# Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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***WPA Art at the Newark Federal Courthouse  
Our Continuing Legacy***

**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office  
And Courthouse, Newark, NJ**

**May 14, 2008 4:00pm**

**Exhibition and a Lecture by Professor Judith Resnik of  
Yale University School of Law entitled "*Representing  
Justice: Newark's Romuald Kraus's Justice in Context.*"  
Dedication of the recreation of destroyed WPA Murals  
originally created for the 1936 Courthouse.**

***The presentation will be followed by a reception - light  
refreshments will be served.***

NEWARK APRIL 24, 2008: The Historical Society for the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey is sponsoring a lecture and exhibition detailing the history of WPA era art that was created for the opening of the Courthouse in 1936. Professor Judith Resnik will give a multimedia presentation examining the creation of the statue as well as its place in the depiction of justice in its various forms. In addition, there will be a dedication of the recreated image of the murals that were destroyed before they were

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ever installed. The Historical Society commissioned Mark Romanoski, an Adjunct Professor at Kean University and Ducret School of Art, North Plainfield, N.J., to create the new depiction.

In 1935 the Section on Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department of the Federal Government announced two competitions - one for a mural painting and one for a statue to be located in two courtrooms of the newly constructed United States Post Office and Courthouse in Newark, New Jersey, which opened in April of 1936. There was a sculpture competition to select a 7-foot high bronze figure of "Justice", with the winner receiving a sum of \$6,500.00 to complete and install the sculpture. The Newark Museum coordinated the competition for a sculpture to grace Courtroom #2. The sculpture selected was created by a relatively unknown artist Romuald Kraus described by local papers as a young artist employed by the WPA.

The sculpture was to be located behind the Judge's bench in a special niche designed for the statue by the architect George Oakley Totten. It was not known at the time, but Totten had hoped to have his wife's statue of Justice installed in the space. Unhappy when he found that his wife had not won, Totten wrote to Edward Rowen, Superintendent of the Section on Painting and Sculpture, stating that he was the best judge of what sculpture should be installed and that if his wife's sculpture were not used, then there should be no sculpture in the courtroom at all. In his response Rowen said the sculpture was selected because "it reflects a new kind of justice, dignified, serene and compassionate. An innocent man on trial for his life could look to this figure for hope." Unfortunately, Totten was only the first hurdle for Kraus's Lady Justice.

Upon completion of the work, the statue was installed in February 1938 behind Judge Guy Fake's bench. Judge Fake was less than pleased. Judge Fake was quoted as saying that he found the statue to smack blatantly of communism and that it did not represent the spirit of justice, but rather that of ruthless confiscation.

Judge Fake wrote a tongue-in-cheek article for the Newark Ledger where he recounted a dialogue that he had with the statue. Judge Fake repeated how the statue had spoken to him. She was misunderstood and did not really belong in the Courthouse without her traditional scales of Justice and her sword. She asked him if she could be removed. Judge Fake granted her wish and had the statue moved to a hallway... no small task since it weighed almost 700 lbs... and so began a long journey around the country to what became a reception of universal acclaim, much to Judge Fake's chagrin.

The rest of the world did not share Judge Fake's opinion and when word got out that the statue was languishing in a dark corridor, the museum community responded, inquiring about the availability of the sculpture for display. The statue first traveled to the Museum of

Modern Art in Washington, D.C., In December, 1938, permission was given for the sculpture to be move from the Museum of Modern Art to the Golden Gate International Exhibition at the World's Fair in San Francisco. It won first prize, being hailed as one of America's great examples of Modern Art. It was on exhibit there from February to December 1939.

Bowing to pressures and mounting notoriety, a meeting was held in November, 1939 among Judge Fake, Judge Clark, Treasury Department officials and Arthur Egner, President of the Newark Museum. An agreement was reached that the statue would return to the Courthouse. It would not reside in the Courtroom but out in the east corridor of the third floor. It was not clear why Judge Fake changed his mind. It could have been the accolades that Lady Justice had received or the possibility that it would grace another Federal Courthouse that had requested it and be lost forever. The statue would spend the early winter of 1940 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts on its way back home from California.

Finally, after winning a national competition, entertaining offers of permanent residence in 4 major museums and several other federal courthouses, Lady Justice returned to her original and permanent home on October 5, 1940, never to leave again. Replicas of the statue can currently be found in the federal courthouse in Covington Kentucky, and the collections of the Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Recently Kraus was finally vindicated. The statue has been moved to his second choice for a location. It currently resides directly outside Judge Fake's old courtroom in the center of the rotunda on the third floor.

The murals suffered a similar fate. Although great effort was expended to create a mural to the exact specifications of the Treasury Department, once again Judge Fake was not happy with the finished project. The winner of the mural competition was a local artist, Tanner Clark of New Brunswick. One of his designs had originally been submitted to a Department of Labor competition. This scene of a child suffering from a factory accident and receiving care was paired with a playground basketball game scene. Judge Fake felt that the labor scene might unfairly influence jurors and ordered that the murals not be installed. Sadly, the murals were placed in storage and were eventually destroyed. However, the Historical Society was able to discover high quality photo images of the murals at the National Archives and worked with Kean University to have them recreated using today's technologies. They are currently on display in the courtroom for which they were originally created on the third floor of the Lautenberg Courthouse.

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