

Familiar feelings

*Depression-era art
connects with
current climate*

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The dark profile of a woman, her head cast downward before a backdrop of smoke stacks, depicts the gloom of 1930s America.

The mood captured in a print by Russian-born Chicago artist Gregory Orloff is typical of Depression-era artwork but also speaks to the current economic climate, says Nathan Harpaz, curator of Oakton Community College's Koehnline Museum of Art housed at the Des Plaines campus.

Sixty-three pieces of Orloff's Depression era-woodcuts, lithographs and etchings are on display at the museum through Friday, Oct. 16.

Orloff was among the thousands of early 20th-century immigrants who came to America just as it sank into the depths of the Great Depression, said Harpaz, who teaches art history and museum studies at Oakton.

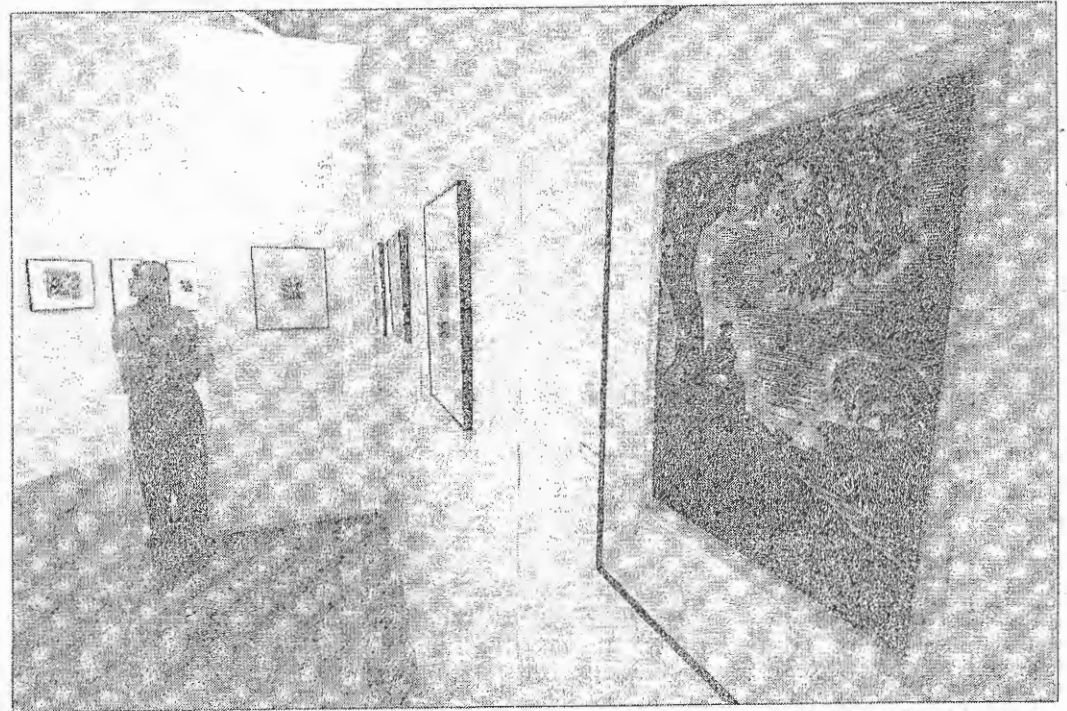
His artwork was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration, an agency created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" that put millions of people to work during the Depression.

Harpaz said the idea of having public commissioned art was a socialist concept inspired by the Soviet Union.

"That's the only place in the world, in the same period of time during the 1930s, that artists were paid by the government," Harpaz said. "That's why it's a very interesting exhibition. Talking about the Depression of the 1930s, there's a lot of connection with what's happening today."

Most of Orloff's prints depict peoples' brooding faces, reflecting the mood of the times, or show landscapes that appear dark and unpleasant, engulfed by smoke from chimneys — a common motif used by Depression-era artists.

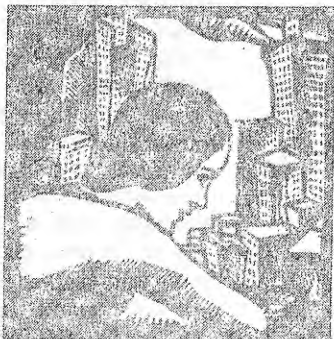
"That's of course what's called social realism, but that's not unique only to Orloff. That's actually what happened to American art," Harpaz said.



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Curator Nathan Harpaz stands near "Untitled (Young Lincoln in New Salem)", one of the Depression-era prints by Gregory Orloff on display through Oct. 16 at the Koehnline Museum of Art at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines.

Some of Gregory Orloff's artwork



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KOEHLIN MUSEUM OF ART

This is a woodcut print of a woman with buildings in the background during the Depression.

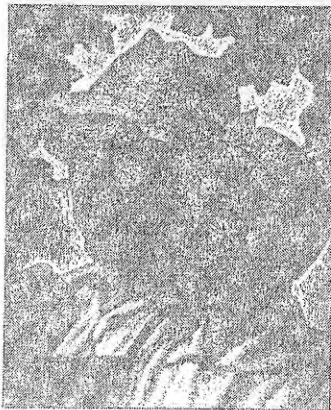
"In the 1930s, that was part of the reality."

Harpaz added that today, socialism "almost sounds like a dirty word."

Orloff was unique in some of his representations, incorporating blacks, Latinos and his own native Russian faces in his work.

"Very few artists depicted diversity in their work in the 1930s, so he was actually exceptional," Harpaz said.

Many of the hundreds of prints Orloff produced during



This print is one of three created in the 1930s called "The Old South: Wood Engravings." Orloff was among the few Depression-era artists who incorporated ethnic diversity.

the 1930s were likely inspired by book illustrations he did, which was his main profession until the 1970s. Several of the books he illustrated also are on display at the museum.

Though the exhibit is temporary, Orloff's pieces are part of the museum's permanent collection. They were donated last year by Chicago art collectors Harlan and Pamela Berk.



"Streets of Paris" was commissioned for the 1933 Chicago World Fair.

The museum is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. It's at 1600 E. Golf Road. Call (847) 635-2633 for details.