

During World War II, the War Art Advisory Committee sent combat artists to nearly every theater of the war to record events that changed the world.

Art Under Fire

By spring 1943, the War Art Advisory Committee, headed by painter and sculptor George Biddle, had selected forty-two artists, many of them with established reputations, to chronicle World War II as part of the Army Corps of Engineers' "War Art Unit." Soon after the first teams began to arrive in the Pacific theater, Congress withdrew funding for the program. Some military artists were assigned to combat units, while many of the civilian artists were left on their own. A few found work as war correspondents for Life Magazine.

The following year, Congress modified its opposition and authorized the soldier-artists to do what many of them were already doing. When the United States Air Force Art Program was begun in 1949, Secretary of the Army Gordon Gray transferred some 275 paintings on Air Force subjects to it. These formed the nucleus of a collection that today contains more than 7,000 works of art.

Many of the paintings in this small selection were sketched on the spot. Some of the artists flew on combat missions, making drawings that became these works once they returned to base.



Briefing at North Africa, by Rudolph Von Ripper.



Shooting the Breeze, by Charles Baskerville. Mr. Baskerville reached the rank of lieutenant colonel as Official Portrait Painter of the Army Air Forces.

Amphibious Vehicle Ready to Pick Up Litter Case, a watercolor by James Scott.



Arthur S. Rothenberg's Operation Zebra. During the war he was stationed near Cambridge, UK, where he documented the activities of the Third Air Division, Eighth Air Force, under the leadership of Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay.





Night Watch on Ascension Island, by Jack Levine. Mr. Levine's paintings are included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, N. Y.; the Museum of Modern Art, N. Y.; and the Art Institute, Chicago, among others.



This painting by Samuel D. Smith is simply called Tragedy. Mr. Smith studied with Jack Levine and as a technical sergeant spent time in west Africa and the China-Burma-India theater. He is now a professor emeritus at the University of New Mexico, where he taught from 1956 until 1984.

Albert Gold painted this bustling street scene, The Field at Thurleigh. He had been inducted in May 1942 and was one of the artists already in the Army before being selected by the Art Advisory Committee. His work is included in the collections of the Library of Congress and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others.





Wounded Aboard, by Lawrence B. Smith.