

The career of Charles Keller is one of painter, printmaker, and cartoonist balanced with the role of political activist. Scenes of labor and portraits of the disenfranchised are prominent in his work. A native of Long Island, New York, Keller had a privileged upbringing. He graduated from Cornell University in 1936. He also studied printmaking at the Art Students League, NY, with Harry Sternberg and Will Barnet in the late 1930s and early 40s. Keller lived for four years in Croton-on-Hudson, NY, for seven years with his family on a co-op farm in Newburg, NY, in the late 1940s and 50s, and Rome Italy, 1961 through 1973. In 1973 he made a permanent move back to New York City.

From 1938 to 1941 Keller worked on a series of paintings and lithographs featuring the construction of the New York Sixth Avenue Subway. He assisted Harry Sternberg on murals for the Lakeview Post Office, Chicago, 1939/42, and for the 1939 New York World's Fair. The World's Fair mural was sponsored by the Roebling Cable Corporation and featured California's Golden Gate Bridge. Keller was an organizer of the Young American Artists' Association, and the Victory Workshop in the 1940s.

In 1940/41 Keller had a studio at One Union Square, on the same floor as Reginald Marsh, and in 1945/53 he was at 30 East 14th Street (formerly occupied by Arnold Blanche), which he shared with Harry Sternberg. There Keller was part of a thriving artists' community; Isabel Bishop, Minna Citron, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Raphael Soyer, were neighbors. Rockwell Kent was another friend from these years.

During World War II Keller was a civilian artist for the Navy in 1943. Also in that year he also designed and researched for the Airways to Peace exhibition, at the Museum of Modern Art, NY. He was art editor of the New Masses, 1945/48, and the March of Labor, 1949/51. He taught art history and studio art at Vassar College in 1952, and Dutchess Community College in 1956, both in Poughkeepsie, NY, and at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY in 1971 (temporarily back from Rome), and Parsons School of Design, NY, in 1992. He was a staff artist and editorial cartoonist for the People's Daily World from 1978 to 1988.

Keller and his family moved to Rome, Italy in 1961, where he continued to paint and exhibit his work. They had planned a one-year visit, but stayed for twelve years, returning to this country in 1973.

Work by Keller has been exhibited widely and in every decade since he first showed at the New York World's Fair at two venues, the American Art section and the Young American Artists Association show. Exhibitions with his work include the American Federation of the Arts traveling show in 1943, 25th Regional Exhibition, Albany Institute of History and Art, NY in 1959, Knickerbocker Artists, National Arts Club, NY in 1960, American Artists in Italy, America Embassy, Rome in 1973, Amerika, Traum und Depression 1920-40,

Akademie der Kunste, Berlin, Germany in 1980, The Artists of Union Square, Associated American Artists, and American Screen Prints, National Academy of Design in 1987, American Society of Contemporary Artists exhibitions, NY in 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 2004, America at Work, 1920-40, Lubin House, Syracuse University Art Collection in Syracuse, NY, L'Amérique de la Depression, Musee-Galerie de la Seita, Paris, France, 1996; Order/Disorder, New York Public Library in NY, 1999, American Scene and the WPA Era Printmakers, Syracuse University in NY, 2000, 100 Years of Prints, Art Students League exhibition in NY, 2002, Rosenberg Show, Puffin Room in NY, 2003 and The American Scene, the British Museum in London, England, 2008.

Among more than twenty one-man shows of work by Keller are those at the New Age Gallery in NY, 1945, ACA Gallery in NY, 1952, Women's City Club Gallery in NY, 1960, Scorpio Gallery in Rome, Italy, 1963, Gallery 32 in Milan, Italy, 1965 and 1967, Drian Gallery in London, England, 1971, Princeton Gallery of Fine Art in New Jersey, 1972, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, 1976 and Mid-Hudson Arts and Science Center in Poughkeepsie, NY, 1980.

Work by Keller was featured at the Susan Teller Gallery in NY, in many shows including the inaugural exhibition, Celebrating New York City, 1988, Mining Scenes of the 1930s and 40s, (Charles Keller, Riva Helfond and Harry Sternberg), 1989, The Artists of 30 East 14th Street, 1992, Industrial Realism, 1997; and A New York Triangle, 1999. The one-man show, Charles Keller, The Sixth Avenue Subway Construction, 1937-1941, 1993. The exhibition, Charles Keller, A Ninetieth Birthday Celebration, Paintings, Prints, and Unique Works on Paper, 1939 to 1960, was held in 2004.

Among those permanent collections with work by Charles Keller are the New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Art Students League in NY, Syracuse University Art Museum, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Library of Congress, the New Britain Museum of American Art in Connecticut, the Mary and Leigh Block Gallery, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, the University of Southeast Missouri, Cape Girardeau, the Wolfsonian, Florida International University, Miami Beach, the House of Friendship, Moscow, Russia, the Anticoli Corrado Museum of Art, Italy, the British Museum, London, England and the Tamiment Library of New York University.