



With Posters, Let's Save Michigan Seeks to Inspire

Museum, Let's Save Michigan team up on art contest to inspire economically battered state

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The Detroit Institute of Arts and the organizer of a public outreach effort called Let's Save Michigan think the economically battered state needs a little inspiration.

They want people to create posters in the fashion of Works Progress Administration artwork of the Great Depression to highlight turnaround efforts and rally Michigan residents to revive the state, which has had the nation's highest unemployment rate for much of the past four years.

"There's so many different ideas about how to turn around Michigan," Let's Save Michigan organizer Sean Mann said Wednesday. "We believe creating viable, attractive cities is key to turning around Michigan's economy."

A contest began this week that accompanies an exhibit at the museum called "Government Support for the Arts: WPA Prints from the 1930s." Entries are being accepted until Feb. 15 on the Let's Save Michigan Web site.

Organizers want the posters to serve as a "call to action" for the state, which has seen its economic struggles intensify amid the collapse of the U.S. auto industry. Michigan's jobless rate was 14.7 percent in November, down from a national high of 15.1 percent in October.

Judges will select 25 finalists and the public will pick winners, which will be announced in March. There's a \$1,000 top prize and the runner-up gets \$250. Some posters also could be produced for sale.

Let's Save Michigan, which started this fall, is supported by the Michigan Municipal League. It was begun in part to get people involved in debates over issues related to the state's economic future ahead of the 2010 elections.

The exhibit of WPA prints at the DIA opened last month and runs through March 21. It features about 100 prints from the museum's collection that were created under the WPA's federal art project, which employed thousands of artists.

Planning for the exhibit began in fall 2008 as the nation became increasingly gripped in economic crisis, said Nancy Sojka, the museum's curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs. She said the exhibit helps illustrate an innovative approach to job creation used by the federal government in the 1930s.

"What was expected back (from WPA programs) was work, but it was work that the people were skilled

at doing," Sojka said. "Artists got to make art."

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