

Commonwealth College Press Release [TRANSCRIPTION]

COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE
MENA, ARKANSAS

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JOE JONES STARTS MURALS
AT COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE

Arkansas is moving up several rungs on America's cultural ladder with the beginning at Commonwealth College, near Mena, of a set of mural paintings by Joe Jones, the St. Louis artist who achieved national distinction by his one-man show in New York City last spring. The murals will be in place in time for the opening of Commonwealth's fall quarter September 30.

Not only is the painter native to the southwest but the theme of his wall paintings will be Arkansas and they will ornament an established Arkansas institution.

Jones has chosen the five walls of an alcove of the Commons, the principal building on the campus, for his work. He has been in Arkansas the past week gathering material for his interpretation of the life of the people. Miners, sharecroppers and other elements of the population will figure in his project.

The fundamental purposes of Commonwealth will be woven into the theme and the completed work is expected to be a significant and ruggedly impressive pictorial appraisal of the social forces operating in Arkansas.

The murals will be so made so that they can be taken down and set up on exhibition elsewhere. Already there are plans for shipping them to some future exhibit of American art on American themes.

Jones is a self-taught artist who graduated under his own power from his former trade of house painting. New York art critics have commented enthusiastically on his freshness and vitality and the mastery of materials and

theme manifested in such well-known paintings as “Roustabouts,” “The New Deal,” “Road to the Beach,” etc.

“Arkansas is an ideal state for the mural painter with social consciousness,” Jones declares. The struggles of the coal miners and the poor farmers against their several forms of adversity, the inescapable racial problem and the pictorial character of the state itself simply cry out for mural treatment. That the paintings will be part of Commonwealth College, where these factors are all brought into intellectual focus, adds to the aesthetic rightness of the project.”

Commonwealth College, now in its thirteenth year, has devoted considerable attention to the dramatic and literary arts but not until Joe Jones’ coming has it made any serious mark in the plastic arts.

Jones is receiving the same compensation that all Commonwealth teachers receive — namely maintenance. The expenses involved are being defrayed by contributions from Arkansas people interested in the culture of the state. Arkansas will be measurably richer in cultural wealth upon the completion of the Commonwealth mural.

Source: Commonwealth College press release about Joe Jones mural, 1935, Dr. John Green Papers, Missouri Historical Society.