

MARY OKIN

Mary Okin is the Assistant Director of the Living New Deal project, a nonprofit that documents, maps, and advocates for New Deal art and public works. After a brief career in nonprofits, Mary pursued graduate study, receiving her MA in Art History and Visual Culture from San Jose State University and a PhD in the History of American Art and Architecture at UC Santa Barbara in 2022. While completing her PhD, Mary worked as a Lecturer in SJSU's Humanities Department, where she taught courses in global and digital humanities. Her research interests include American painting from the colonial era to the present, the understudied lives of women artists, issues of canon formation, labor movement history, and the local. Her current research includes writing the first scholarly monograph on the American painter Wayne Thiebaud (1920-2021) and two digital humanities projects: "Mining @ Tenth Street: Visualizing New York City's Tenth Street Studio Building (1857-1956)," on the history of the first building designed to house practicing artists in the United States, and "March With Us! Lessons in Activism @ San Jose State," an oral history of Civil Rights era student organizing in the 1960s-70s. At Living New Deal, Mary leads the "New Deal Data Literacy" and "Advocating for New Deal Art" initiatives, which involves outreach, fostering collaboration, and assembling resources for studying, teaching, and maintaining the rich and complex legacy of New Deal art. Since spring of 2025, she has been on the front lines of fighting to preserve the U.S. General Services Administration's federal art collection and especially the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building in Washington DC, which is decrated with art by Ben Shahn, Philip Guston and others and faces the threat of accelerated sale and demolition.

