

Prints with a Purpose

Chee Chin, Pauline Vinson

During the Great Depression (1929–1939), many people in the United States and abroad struggled to make ends meet due to low wages, a lack of jobs, and skyrocketing costs of living. To help support arts workers and inspire the creation of morale-boosting art and design, the U.S. government created the Federal Art Project (FAP), a program that funded artists and encouraged the creation of new public art. Pauline Vinson (1915–1986) and fellow artist Chee Chin S. Cheung Lee (1896–1966), the subject of this artwork, were both employed by the San Francisco arm of the FAP.

Pauline's work shows Chee, a Chinese-born artist, seated in front of an artwork on paper. He holds a fine paintbrush and paints an image of a flower. A cup and a box of pencils sit on the table next to him. In the background, another artist carefully works at an easel, while two artworks lie on a table in the back of the studio. Pauline and other FAP artists used an artform called printmaking, where an artist makes multiple prints of an original drawing. Each print is unique, owing to slight differences in the tone of the ink or placement on the page.

Pauline made this artwork using a kind of printmaking called lithography. To create a lithograph, an artist draws on a printing plate, which is often made of metal or stone, using a waxy or oily substance, such as a wax crayon. Next, a chemical solution is applied to the surface of the printing plate, which makes the part of the plate without the wax crayon drawing repel water. Water-based ink is applied to the entire plate, but only sticks to the drawing. Once the plate is inked, paper is set on top of it and it is run through a printing press, which transfers the ink on top of the original drawing to the paper, creating a print.

Pauline and other printmakers working for the FAP often depicted activities or images from daily life. This lithograph is a glimpse into the life of an artist working during the Great Depression, taking inspiration from her colleagues and surroundings.



Pauline Vinson. *Chee Chin*. 1936. The Baltimore Museum of Art: The United States General Services Administration, formerly Federal Works Agency, Works Progress Administration, on extended loan to the Baltimore Museum of Art., BMA L.1943.9.726. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General Services Administration, WPA, Federal Art Project, 1935-1943

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Classroom Activities

Pauline created lithographs, prints that are created by the reaction between oil-based substances and water. Other forms of printmaking are done by carving an image into a surface, inking it, then applying paper on top to transfer the picture. Students can create their own prints using Styrofoam trays, paper, paint, and a pencil or ballpoint pen. Invite students to draw an image or design onto the Styrofoam tray. Apply a thin layer of paint with a roller or paint brush, being careful not to get paint in the lines of the drawing. Then lay a piece of paper onto the paint, pressing down evenly over the whole surface. Peel the paper away, and you are left with a print of your drawing! For a full tutorial, visit:

[How to Do Styrofoam Printmaking \(artfulparent.com\)](http://artfulparent.com)



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