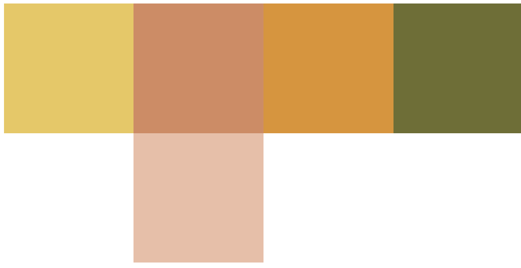


With a Little Help from Our Friends:

New Perspectives on the Collection

Great Plains Art Museum

March 6–August 8, 2026

The Center for Great Plains Studies, with its Great Plains Art Museum, is an interdisciplinary educational and cultural hub that cultivates awareness of and engagement with the diverse people, cultures, and natural environments of the Great Plains. Organized in conjunction with the Center's 50th anniversary, *With a Little Help from Our Friends* highlights this interdisciplinary focus of the Center and its core intellectual community, the Great Plains Fellows. The Fellows as a group are scholars and community members who are concerned with the past, present, and future of the Great Plains. Fellows support the Center and its mission in myriad ways, including serving on its Board of Governors, contributing to the Center's journals, and giving Great Plains-related talks.

This co-curated exhibition provides another avenue for Fellows to connect with the Center. Twenty Fellows that represent a range of disciplines and all four University of Nebraska campuses were invited to participate and given access to the Museum's permanent collection. Each Fellow selected an artwork and provided a thoughtful and engaging response that considers the artwork through their scholarly lens, conveys their lived experiences, or situates the piece within the history and culture of the Great Plains. These new and diverse perspectives from our Fellows emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration as we look to the next 50 years of the Center and Museum.

Support for this exhibition is provided by the
Charles W. Guildner Great Plains Art Museum Excellence Fund.

Center for Great Plains Studies & Great Plains Art Museum

1155 Q Street, Lincoln, NE 68588

402-472-6220

go.unl.edu/plainsart

Alfred T. Anderson
b. 1865, Engelholm (today Ängelholm), Sweden; d. 1957, Kearney, NE

Midway Hotel, between 1886 and 1888

Collodion silver chloride print
5 ⅝ x 9 ⅜ inches
Gift of Dr. John and Elizabeth Christlieb, 1981.0539

I felt a trickle of sweat down my back as I sat in the fifth-grade classroom on the third floor of the northeast end of the St. James Catholic Elementary School on the corner of 25th Street and 2nd Avenue in Kearney, Nebraska. We had come in from recess, still an aerobic and vigorous time, punctuated by warm spring days that induced just a bit of classroom fidgeting. No more than 100 yards away, I had an uninterrupted view of the Mid Way Hotel. The original Midway Hotel as pictured in A.T. Anderson's photograph had burned in 1890, and I was staring at the reconstruction that opened in 1894 (see postcard image below). The second building was remarkably similar to the first in expanse and design. Why the difference in naming, with a space between Mid and Way, I don't know. The ten-year-old version of myself gazed at the hotel most days in 1963. I was rarely in the hotel, but recall vividly once having had lunch that spring of 1963 with a friend and his aunt and uncle from our old neighborhood in Minneapolis. If I had known what the word cosmopolitan meant, I believe it would have characterized me, if only for an hour or so. My friend was headed on a road trip to California. Wow... California! This was the stuff of daydreams. In the early 1960s, the Mid Way Hotel epitomized Kearney's slogan "1733 miles to Frisco and 1733 miles to Boston." I was taken with this notion and had a Walter Mitty–like fascination with travel, perhaps more so to the west than the east. My dream came true when my family traveled by train when I was twelve years old to Los Angeles to visit relatives. Shortly thereafter, Union Pacific curtailed passenger train travel. But I must say that to this day, the old Midway Hotel...or Mid Way Hotel...remains my inspiration for wanderlust across the Great Plains. And, I thank A.T. Anderson, longtime Kearney photographer, for preserving a young boy's dreams.

Charles J. Bicak, Professor Emeritus, Biology, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Postcard depicting Mid Way Hotel, Kearney, Nebraska, 1909.

Flora Cable Huckfield
b. 1876, Brownhelm, OH; d. 1960, Santa Barbara, CA

The Plowman, 1927

Glazed ceramic
4 ¾ x 6 ½ inches
Agrarian Spirit in the Homestead Era—Artwork from the Moseman Collection of Agrarian Art, 2022.0005.0036

The Plowman, like the Plains, conceals far more complicated stories than its modest appearance would suggest. This vase and other pottery pieces from the North Dakota School of Mines at the University of North Dakota literally embody the Plains: shaped from its clays, decorated with motifs from its landscape and history, glazed in colors evoking its hues, fired in kilns powered by electricity generated from its lignite, and proudly stamped with its place of origin.

A UND chemistry professor, Earle J. Babcock, recognized the potential of North Dakota clays for ceramics and advocated for the establishment of a Ceramics Department to conduct chemical and physical tests on the clays and produce products proving their use and value. Margaret Cable was hired in 1910 and would eventually teach her popular UND courses, enrolling many women, for thirty-nine years. Margaret would also work with Babcock to develop the methods, forms, and aesthetics that are today associated with this school of pottery. Margaret wrote about the experiment: "To make this pottery wholly indigenous to North Dakota, in addition to fashioning it from native clays, design motifs are drawn from the prairie. Native flowers, plants, birds and animals are therefore used . . ." (1926). While Babcock's interests were state boosterism, Cable brought an artist's eye to the project, honed at the Handicraft Guild in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one of the oldest Arts & Crafts organizations in the country. Their pottery represents a Great Plains take on Arts & Crafts design, simple but beautifully crafted, with a focus on workmanship and design. ND School of Mines pottery, created by UND students and instructors, would be sent to state fairs, national meetings, world fairs, and expositions representing North Dakota, including the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco and the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.

This vase by Flora Cable Huckfield, sister of Margaret who began assisting at UND in 1924, depicts a homesteader plowing, a historic motif from North Dakota's recent settler colonial past. Art pottery was a specialty dominated by women in the Arts & Crafts era, being viewed as a medium appropriate for the gender.

Christina E. Dando, Peter Kiewit Professor of Geography, University of Nebraska at Omaha

George Tuck
b. 1942, Amarillo, TX; d. 2023, Lincoln, NE

Looking West, from the *Flat Places and Interesting People* series, 1998

Gelatin silver print
8 x 12 inches
Gift of the artist, 2007.0018.0020
© Great Plains Art Museum. University of Nebraska.

I come from a country where the mountains and the ocean are never far away. Waking up every day to the towering *Andes* or the majestic *Manquehue*, spending the day watching the Pacific Ocean became part of the background of my life. That is probably why I found George Tuck's *Looking West* so attractive. It represents the absolute antithesis of what I long for. The vastness and emptiness of the Plains—a yellow-green desert in summer, a brown-white desert in winter—that I first saw from the highest room in the tallest building in Omaha, the first time I was in Nebraska, has become imprinted in my memory. The flatness that Tuck captured reminds me, in some ways, of the sea on a quiet day. It evokes a similar, though different, kind of calmness. This would be a quiet calmness, because, unlike the sea, the flat plains are eerily quiet in winter. The wind, described in the photographer's notes, is not in the frame, but I can still feel it. It turns the stillness into motion—and the Plains into sea.

Beyond its visual appeal, the photograph also resonates with me as a migration scholar. It reminds me not only of the need to consider physical space when we reflect on inclusion, memory, and nostalgia, but also of the moment of departure itself. This is how I imagine many migrants see the road ahead—regardless of whether it stretches across plains, oceans, or mountains—vast, empty, unknown, with no real end in sight. Despite a road that can sometimes feel like an "oppressive vastness," like the Plains themselves, the uncertainty of reception, and the fear of being treated as an "alien," an unwelcome other, migrants still embark on their journey with the hope that beyond that horizon, where nothing is yet visible, life might just be better.

Cristián Doña-Reveco, Associate Professor, Sociology & Anthropology, Director, Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Richard Terrell
b. 1940, Joliet, IL

Sandhills #3, 2012

Pastel on paper
18 ⅜ x 24 ½ inches
Gift of the artist, 2017.0008.0001
© Great Plains Art Museum. University of Nebraska.

When I first traveled through the Plains after growing up in the forested landscapes of the eastern US, I immediately felt the lessening of constraints and a sense of being able to fully breathe. Those feelings are aptly captured by Richard Terrell's pastel drawing entitled *Sandhills #3*. For me, one of the intriguing parts of the Sandhills landscape is the juxtaposition of scales. The vast expanses of grass reaching into the sky encourage the gaze and the mind to extend outward. This spaciousness is evident in the dense, blended span of greens, golds, and browns that occupy most of Terrell's drawing. The eye is drawn across the undulating hills and from the lake nestled near the center of the image to the hint of another sliver of water on the horizon above. Yet in grasslands, one can also focus on the subtle, the delicate mixture of plants with their varied forms, with individuals of a species sometimes clustered and sometimes alone amidst a sea of neighbors. This detail is captured in the linear strokes of the pastel and the patchy distribution of color. What emerges in this artwork is the melding of simplicity and complexity that for me is the magic of the Sandhills landscape.

Sheri Fritz, George Holmes University Professor,
Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences,
School of Biological Sciences,
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Paul A. Johnsgard
b. 1931, Fargo, ND; d. 2021, Lincoln, NE

Allison Johnson
b. 1988, Gallipolis, OH

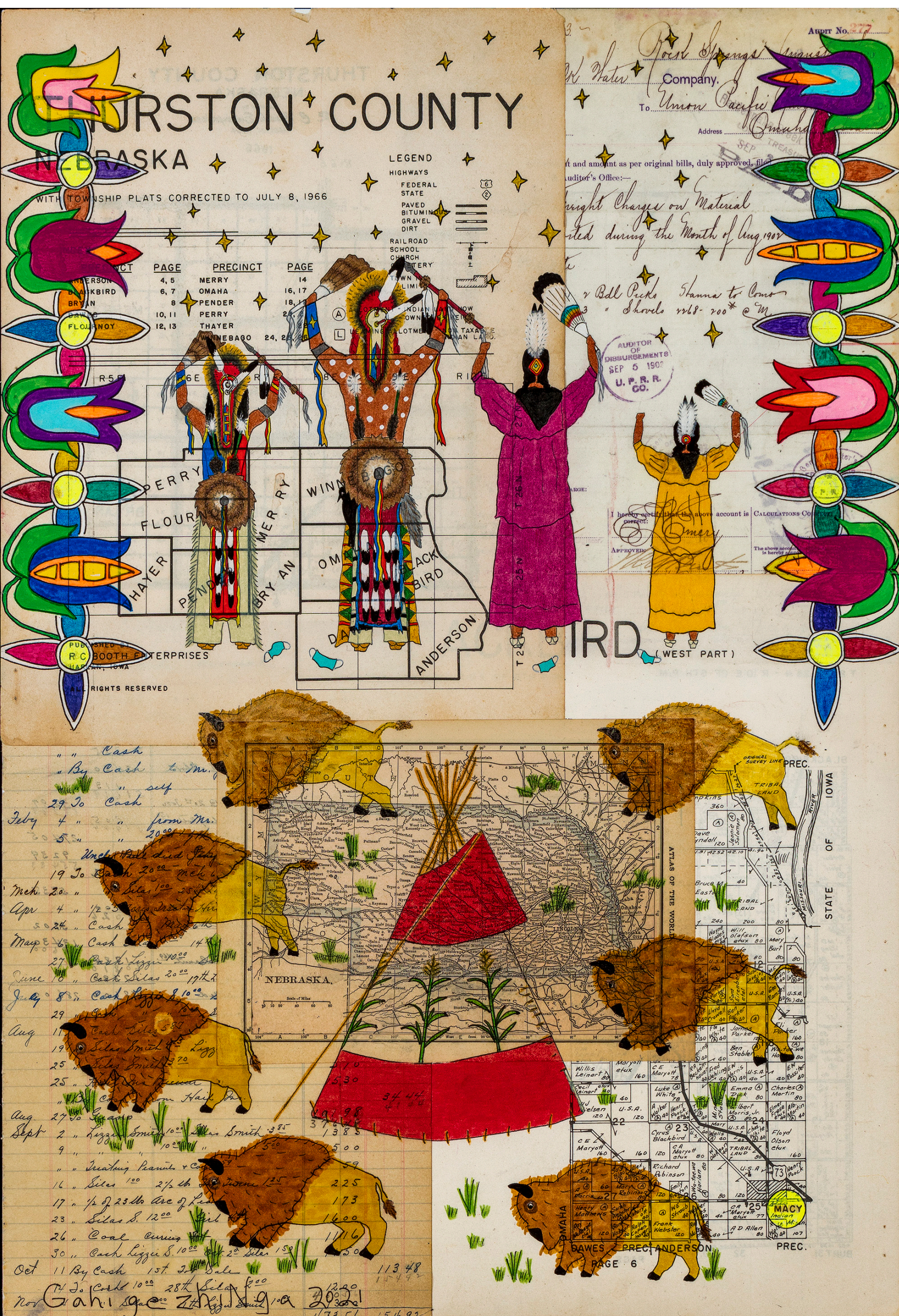
Lewis's Woodpecker (Melanerpes lewis), 2004

Hand-colored photomechanical print
13 x 9 ½ inches
Gift of Paul A. Johnsgard, 2004.0002.0012
© Paul A. Johnsgard © Allison Johnson. Used by permission.

Paul Johnsgard was *the* renowned ornithologist of the Great Plains. Scientist, UNL professor, and wonderful wordsmith of migrating cranes and other Nebraskan bird life, he was also a fine visual artist, as this drawing of a pair of Lewis's Woodpeckers exemplifies. This woodpecker species is an artist's delight by nature, with its almost impossible pastiche of red, salmon, and dark green. But its history is also an untoward reminder that Anglo-American names for native birds are often themselves acts of Western imperialism, of a will to power in the very labeling of the non-human world. As early colonial eyes/I's in the Euro-American encounter with the American West, Lewis and Clark each had a bird named after him—Clark's Nutcracker and the eponymous woodpecker on display here.

The first Lewis's Woodpecker I ever saw flapped leisurely to the side of a huge telephone pole on the outskirts of Rapid City, in the foothills of the Black Hills of South Dakota. I recalled that this big-winged, dark-backed bird was aptly nicknamed the "crow woodpecker," and I actually first assumed that it was a crow. But a K-Mart binoculars' examination of its ruby-colored face and salmon-flecked belly quickly ended that illusion. Perfect in its incredibility, "Lewie" was one of those brilliancies that birders come to cherish on their own spot of ground as one of a special handful of birds that make that place a place, unique and magical. This bird is thus one of my fondest memories—of the Black Hills, of birding, of just being a kid "awe-stuck" by the more-than-human world. But now that child's naïveté resides side-by-side with an adult's historical consciousness: I cannot look at Johnsgard's piece of art without thoughts of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and of bird names as emblems not only of Western epistemic violence, but of the physical colonial domination and decimation of both Indigenous birds and peoples.

Thomas Gannon
(Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe),
Associate Professor,
English and Ethnic Studies,
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Edmundo “Gahi’gezhiNga” Encinas
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska
b. 1965, San Francisco, CA

The Originators…still., 2021

Ink, colored pencil, gel pen, and collage
24 x 18 inches
Gift of Gahi’gezhiNga, 2022.0008.0001
© Edmundo “Gahi’gezhiNga” Encinas. Used by permission.

Four Omaha dancers stand with their arms raised, bordered by beautiful applique designs, while seven buffalo surround a tipi adorned with cornstalks. Umónhon artist Eddie “Gahi’gezhiNga” Encinas drew these images on Thurston County and Nebraska state documents in ledger art style. I am a citizen of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and a faculty member in History at UNL. I was captivated by this beautiful collage, knowing the history of ledger art as a practice that surfaced during the Reservation era. Native Americans across the Plains recorded events within ledgers issued by US officials and missionaries, turning implements of colonization into Indigenous stories. Gahi’gezhiNga continues this artistic tradition, asserting the Umónhon as the Original people of the land, challenging the mapping created by the United States. Animals and plants represented by the buffalo and corn join the Umónhon as “The Originators.” These figures look toward the future as the seven buffalo channel the Indigenous philosophy of the seven generations: considering the impact of environmental decisions made today on the next seven generations.

Today the Omaha Nation and Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska have reservation lands in northeast Nebraska. Native American people are 60% of the total population of Thurston County and are the majority of voting age residents. In 2023, the Winnebago Tribe and the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska filed a lawsuit against Thurston County’s redistricting plans that would dilute the Native American vote. The lawsuit was ruled in favor of the Tribes, and Thurston County’s redistricting plans were found to be in violation of the Voting Rights Act (1965). *The Originators… still.* encapsulates the resilience of contemporary Native nations today, the continuous fight to assert rights, and the rootedness of Indigenous culture and traditions.

Angel M. Hinzo (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), Assistant Professor, History and Ethnic Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Michael Farrell
b. 1947, Indianapolis, IN

Abandoned Farm House, 1998

Gelatin silver print
16 x 20 inches
Museum purchase, 2007.0003
© Michael Farrell. Used by permission.

Much like an abandoned farm house, for those who only see it from the outside, the Great Plains occupies an empty space in the American geographical imagination. But while Michael Farrell's print of an abandoned farm house in Jefferson County, Nebraska, could serve as a symbol of how outsiders perceive the region, it also embodies the rich tapestry of experiences and challenges and the enduring connection between people and the land, woven by those of us who live and work and play on the Great Plains. Although abandoned, it is a mark of an unwitting autobiography of the inhabitants who used and shaped the region to meet their wants and needs. Although empty, it will always be home to those who lived there, just like the region will always be home to the many families who have left the rural Great Plains in search of opportunities elsewhere. I am reminded of my own youth in rural Gage County, not all that far from where this abandoned farm house stands, and although the farm house that I grew up in has now long been empty, when I drive by, I am filled with a pride that only a Plainsman could describe, with memories of growing up in a house my grandfather built, my father spending long nights out in the field, my mother cooking meals I can still smell decades later, and running around with my sister in the yard. When I see this print, I don't see an abandoned farm house, I see a home. I don't see an empty space, I see a place that we give meaning to with our personal and cultural understanding of it. I see a powerful symbol of the Great Plains, of all those who came before us who will always be a part of the region's story.

Andrew Husa, Lecturer, School of Global Integrative Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Tyra Shackleford
Chickasaw
b. 1986, Oklahoma City, OK

Not Forgotten, 2020

Porcupine quills, Worbla thermoplastic, leather, satin, cotton, grommets, sewing thread, hook and eye, invisible zipper, fusible interfacing; wrapped quillwork, machine and hand sewing
42 x 27 ½ x 22 inches; dimensions vary
Museum purchase through the generosity of BNSF Railway Foundation and Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation, 2022.0003.0001.a-b
©Tanni' (Tyra Shackleford)

It is often said that *Indigenous women disappear three times*: first, when we go missing; second, when the media fails to report our stories; and third, when science erases us from the data. *Not Forgotten*, a contemporary Native narrative designed and created by Chickasaw textile artist Tyra Shackleford, not only confronts this cycle of erasure by illuminating the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) epidemic but also emphasizes the need for a woven approach to health disparities, one that respects local, Indigenous, and conventional ways of knowing. Shackleford's use of mixed media with quillwork, interlacing, and needlecraft exemplifies this. The relationship among the three colors—red, white, and black—in the dress also serves as a visual reminder to seek and find this balance.

Shackleford's work demonstrates how strength, resilience, and beauty emerge when public health challenges like MMIW are approached with intentional recognition of diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing. Her identity as a Chickasaw, Indigenous, American woman-mother-teacher-scientist-artist is interlaced with knowledge revealed through lived experience, Indigenous mentorship, and scholarly research. Respecting the integrity of each perspective, she creates unexpected juxtapositions, pairing porcupine quills and leather with thread and cotton, and even Worbla thermoplastic and adhesive. The wrapped quillwork, interlacing ribbon, and thermoplastic shaping collectively draw viewers into the heart space.

Innovation arises from the heart as much as the mind, where emotion and intellect, art and science, tradition and modernity converge to create new possibilities. Respecting local, Indigenous, and conventional perspectives invites us to imagine boldly, innovate with intention, and inspire future generations. This was true for our ancestors, remains true for us, and will endure with future generations. *Not Forgotten* can serve as both a memorial and a call to action, reminding us that we all have a part to play in advocating for justice and systemic change to end this epidemic and promote the health and wellbeing of Indigenous women through innovations that embrace local, Indigenous, and conventional knowledge systems.

Regina Idoate (Cherokee Nation), Associate Professor & Director of Spirituality, Culture and Health, Department of Health Promotion, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Bill Rabbit
Cherokee Nation
b. 1946, Casper, WY; d. 2012, Tulsa, OK

Butterfly Lady, date unknown

Acrylic on paper
20 x 10 inches
Gift in honor of John R. Wunder, 1997.0013

I was initially drawn to this piece because of the colors, fine lines, and intricate details. I love the way the piece flows simultaneously like wings and fabric, giving the still image so much motion.

After selecting it for exhibit, I learned more about the artist and developed further appreciation for his work and skill. Born in 1946, Bill Rabbit was a self-taught painter and jewelry maker from the Cherokee Nation. He grew up in Wyoming and spent most of his adult life in Oklahoma. In his biography tied to his art studio, he spoke of being inspired as a child by the changing colors of the sky and other forms in nature. This is very evident in this piece with its sunset-style background and the beautiful butterfly motif.

Bill was a prolific artist over the course of his life and received several honors and accolades for his work. Some of those include the 1982 *Night of the First Americans* exhibition with the John F. Kennedy Center and Smithsonian Institute, Five Civilized Tribes Master Artist, and Cherokee Honors Society Medal of Honor Award. In 2011, the Cherokee Nation designated Bill as a Cherokee National Treasure, a distinction given to those who have made significant contributions to preserve the tribe's art, language, and culture. Bill was recognized for this due to his artistry and his work preserving Cherokee culture.

It was an honor to learn about Bill's work through this exhibition and have the opportunity to share it with others.

Darby Kurtz, Assistant Professor; Special Collections Curator, McGoogan Health Sciences Library, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Edmundo “Gahi’gezhiNga” Encinas
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska
b. 1965, San Francisco, CA

Home Sweet Home!?, 2021

Ink, colored pencil, and gel pen on 1911 antique map
12 x 16 inches
Museum purchase through the generosity of BNSF Railway Foundation, 2022.0007.0001
© Edmundo “Gahi’gezhiNga” Encinas. Used by permission.

Edmundo Encinas’s *Home Sweet Home!?* layers brightly colored tipis, masked figures, and roadside barricades onto a 1911 map of Nebraska, producing an artwork that is both visually compelling and politically precise. At first glance, the scene feels familiar: a line of tipis across a Great Plains landscape, rendered with striking variation and care. But the map beneath them is a map of control—an artifact of survey lines, allotment, borders, and U.S. Indian Service paperwork. Encinas turns that document into a site of refusal, overwriting bureaucratic history with presence, agency, and cultural continuity.

The work centers on the Omaha Reservation during the COVID-19 pandemic, when checkpoints and travel restrictions were enacted to protect elders and preserve community health. The hand-drawn sign—“COVID-19 CHECKPOINT / STAY HOME / PROTECT OUR ELDERS”—anchors the piece firmly in 2021, demonstrating that sovereignty is not only historical, but ongoing and enforced at the scale of everyday life. Encinas’s masked figures, standing watch among traffic cones, reveal a simple truth: even during a global crisis, Indigenous communities took care of their own when federal systems often failed them.

As a designer who studies climate adaptation, community autonomy, and environmental justice, I read this artwork as a landscape of self-determination. The tipis are not nostalgia; they are shelters, families, kinship networks, and the right to protect home. The map beneath them reminds us that settler cartography attempted to define this region with lines and acreage, yet Indigenous futures remain drawn by the people who live here.

Home Sweet Home!? is layered, grounded, and deeply rooted in place. It asks who gets to draw the map—and who gets to stay safe on it.

Salvador Lindquist, Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Laurie Houseman-Whitehawk
Ho-Chunk (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska)/Santee Sioux
b. 1952, Omaha, NE

Circle of Life, 1995

Gouache on paper
23 ¼ x 25 ¼ inches
Purchased through the generosity of the Friends of the Center for Great Plains Studies, 2000.0004

The following is a brief reaction to *Circle of Life* by Laurie Houseman-Whitehawk. Viewing *Circle of Life* reminded me of my appreciation of art as well as the fact that I have no artistic talent. That stated, *Circle of Life* appealed to my very being. The work pulled me into the wonders that surround me, physical and metaphysical. Colors jumped out at me, clearly capturing the beauty in the circle of land, people, culture, religion, and much more that are vividly portrayed by the artist. The picture affirmed the importance of artistic expression. The boundless circle, punctuated with brilliant drawings, reassures me that my understanding or questioning should not cease. The appealing aesthetics encourage me to explore the journey of the circle. I wish I could jump into the artwork to be part of the dynamic presented by the artist. It is evident that land, people, culture, and religion in the circle are settled and unsettled. The work inspires me to better observe that which is in the circle, knowing that the circle launches me into a life of observation, knowing, questioning, and action.

Peter Longo, Professor, Political Science,
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Gerald Schwartz
b. 1940, Brooklyn, NY

Enchanting Light, 2003

Oil on canvas
60 x 48 inches
Gift of the Mark & Carol Moseman Collection of Agrarian Art, 2004.0011.0001
© Gerald Schwartz

As an entomologist (observer of insects), I cannot help it—I look for these little relatives everywhere. My eyes are always scanning for their presence on all things around me. It is tempting to think of insects and their kin as creatures of dark corners and cracks, tucked under rocks and leaves. But in fact, more move in the sun's light than we know.

As a child, I imagined the sky as a vaporous blue shield—something soft that tucked us in from a cold space, interrupted only by clouds, storms, and the whispers of passing souls. I never imagined it was full of life. Yet today, scientists can track the trillions of insects that travel above us, riding currents and winds. The sky is not empty. It is a moving canopy, an aerobiome full of insects, and also bacteria, pollen, fungi, spores, algae.

Gerald Schwartz's *Enchanting Light*, born on road trips from Los Angeles to Kansas City, captures that sense of motion. The painting's perspective might be from the ground looking up, but I wonder: who was looking down? How many insects crossed above Schwartz as he drove? Not those that met the grill of his car, but the millions—perhaps trillions—he traveled under. How many are echoed in the light and movement of his paint? When you look up, let your eyes linger for a moment and remember: they are there drifting above us.

This interpretation is influenced by NPR's "Look Up! The Billion-Bug Highway You Can't See" and the work of scientists using planes (Gressitt et al., 1961) and weather radar (Mungee et al., 2025) to study insect migration.

Louise Lynch-O'Brien, Associate Professor of Insect Biology, Entomology, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

go.unl.edu/lookup

Adam Emory Albright's *Hidden Treasures* captures a quiet moment of discovery: two young boys, modeled after the artist's twin sons, sit absorbed in observation amid a sunlit grassland. Painted in 1901 in the impressionist style for which Albright was known, the work shimmers with warmth and curiosity. The boys' gaze, focused intently on something unseen to the viewer, invites us to imagine what they have found among the grasses: an insect, a wildflower, perhaps a glint of color that momentarily transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

In this way, *Hidden Treasures* reflects the essence of the Great Plains. These landscapes rarely reveal themselves all at once. Unlike mountains or forests that command attention through grandeur, grasslands ask us to slow down, look closely, and attune ourselves to subtler forms of beauty. Beneath their apparent simplicity lies a complex world of motion and life—plants bending in the wind, insects weaving through seedheads, soils teeming with unseen vitality.

Albright's painting captures not only the physical texture of the prairie but also the spirit of wonder it can inspire. Through the children's absorbed attention, he reminds us of a way of seeing that many of us lose as adults—a sense of openness and reverence for the small miracles of the natural world. *Hidden Treasures* thus becomes both a portrait of childhood curiosity and a meditation on landscape perception. For those of us who study and cherish the Great Plains, it offers a gentle challenge: to recover that childlike attentiveness and recognize that the treasures of these vast grasslands are not hidden at all, but waiting quietly to be noticed.

Gwendŵr Meredith, Assistant Professor, Natural Resources, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Adam Emory Albright
b. 1862, Monroe, WI; d. 1957, Warrenville, IL

Hidden Treasures, 1901

Oil on canvas
23 5⁄8 x 15 5⁄8 inches
Agrarian Spirit in the Homestead Era—Artwork from the Moseman Collection of Agrarian Art, 2022.0005.0030

I see myself in the tall, young man
Holding the ewe aloft and
Surging toward the shearers who
Race to relieve sheep of their wool while
Bundles are bound toward auction.

Spilled beer, sweat, wet wool, and manure
Round out the smell of the Great Hall, built from last year's wool.
The band plays, maybe "Roll Out! Heave Dat Cotton,"
While two women consider the
Wagers being placed on the two teams.
What a din! But full of community.

I remember the first time I heard of the
Famous homesteader, Daniel Freeman, who first claimed
Nebraska dirt near Beatrice.
Could Freeman's lonely effort have occurred
Just fifteen years
Before this newspaper was published?

Fifteen summers and winters to gather neighbors,
Build a church and a school,
Set up fences for sheep and cattle, and
Plow the prairie to feed their family?

I cannot promise this is true, but
Perhaps the year before
Some of the sheep in this image
Witnessed the Omaha tribe traveling
Southwest of their forced home in Macy
In search of bison.

Four hundred miles the Omaha traveled
Before they found the beasts
For the last time.

The land had changed and
The people had changed. And the
Southern Nebraska Wool-Growers' Association
Now hosted a shearing contest.

We are left with the question, "Who won?"
I bet it was not the Omaha.

Larkin Powell, Professor, Natural Resources, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1877, by Frank Leslie, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

No. 1,133—Vol. XLIV.] NEW YORK, JUNE 16, 1877. [Price, with Supplement, 10 Cents. $4.00 Yearly. 13 Weeks, $1.00.

NEBRASKA.—SHEEP-SHEARING FESTIVAL OF THE SOUTHERN NEBRASKA WOOL-GROWERS' ASSOCIATION AT BEATRICE, MAY 2d.
From a Photograph by R. L. Newton, Beatrice.—See Page 253.

Albert Berghaus
active 1869–1880

Nebraska—Sheep-Shearing Festival of the Southern Nebraska Wool-Growers' Association at Beatrice, circa 1877

Wood engraving
16 x 11 ¼ inches
Gift of Albert Mikuta, 1983.0020

George Tuck
b. 1942, Amarillo, TX; d. 2023, Lincoln, NE

Cowboys, from the *Flat Places and Interesting People* series, 1998

Gelatin silver print
8 x 12 inches
Gift of the artist, 2007.0018.0076
© Great Plains Art Museum. University of Nebraska.

Cattle feedyards dot the landscape of the Great Plains. In fact, about two-thirds of all feedyards and feedyard workers in the United States are in this region. Feedyards are interesting spaces, with both physical and social organization that extends beyond the cattle to the humans behind the production. Through my visits to feedyards around the region, I have learned about day-to-day cattle care, markets and international trade, genetics and efficiencies, gates, chutes, ropes, horses, and so much more. While all of this is fascinating, like photographer George Tuck, I find myself much more intrigued by the interesting people I meet—the people working at the feedyard—the cowboys, feed truck drivers, veterinarians, and managers. I love to listen to their stories, some of which are long-standing family legacies of cattle feeding, while others are new to this place and to this industry, reflecting the juxtaposition of tradition and transition.

I chose this piece because it speaks to my current research project, the Cattle Feedyard Worker Health Study, where we are exploring physical, mental, and social well-being among this vital agricultural workforce. My eyes were immediately drawn to the cowboys on horseback, reminding me that feedyards are one of the last places one can be a cowboy. For me, this image captures the unique skills, quiet strength, and spirit of these workers. Although this is a still photo, it represents movement, of course movement of cattle, but also movement of people on the feedyard and to the feedyard, including oftentimes coming from other countries to work at the feedyard.

While Tuck used his camera, my team and I use our research tools to tell these stories, leveraging the strengths of public health and community engagement to promote well-being among the people who sustain production agriculture. I, like Tuck, feel compelled in my work with feedyards and feedyard workers to look closely, listen deeply, and honor the dignity of their work, the humanity within industry, and the enduring beauty of the Great Plains. Both this photograph and our research and interactions illuminate a shared truth: that these “flat places” are full of depth, character, and extraordinary people who make the landscape come alive.

Athena Ramos, Associate Professor, College of Public Health and Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Sarah Rowe
Lakota/Ponca Tribe of Nebraska
b. 1981, Omaha, NE

For My Fleabitten Diamond, 2022

Oil, acrylic, and ink on canvas
49 ½ x 73 ½ inches
Commissioned for the Elizabeth Rubendall Artist-in-Residence Collection, 2022.0004.0001
© Sarah Rowe. Used by permission.

Sarah Rowe painted *For My Fleabitten Diamond* after nearly dying of COVID. “I hadn’t seen the sky for a month,” she told me. “Then I saw the sky and it was like a rebirth—I felt like a newborn baby.” So that’s what she painted, the “cotton candy Nebraska sky,” along with the Plains landscape, all in her embracing and embraceable color palette. At the center of it all—or at least she would be if she didn’t insist on standing every-so-slightly to the side—is Diamond, a therapy horse who worked with Rowe at Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy in Gretna. Only Diamond is more here. She appears as a Heyoka, a Lakota sacred clown, with limbs that might embrace the universe with grand whimsy. Rowe’s iconography, as always, enchants with its ability to feel both traditional and idiosyncratic.

For My Fleabitten Diamond makes me feel alive, makes me feel a part of something, particularly those eyes rising in the lower corner. The eyes witness me awing at Diamond, flea-bitten savior, yet they also stand as witness, drawing me into Sarah’s rejoicing. The painting is perceived, but it is also a depiction of perception. The image of Sarah, on oxygen and malnourished from the sickness, exploding with vision, painting with her hands at points, thrills, humbles, and inspires me. It is life, earnest and absurd, and I want more of it. More life!

Todd Richardson, James R. Schumacher Chair of Ethics; Professor, Goodrich Scholarship Program, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Gwen Westerman
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate/Cherokee Nation
b. 1957, Camden, AR

Plains Sunset, 2016

Commercial cotton with beaded embellishment
69 ⅝ x 68 ½ inches
Commissioned for the Elizabeth Rubendall Artist-in-Residence
Collection, 2016.0001.0001
© Gwen Westerman

Is there anything more iconic about the Great Plains than a stunning sunset? Luminously highlighting land and sky in a brilliant but temporary riot of color. From the Prairie Provinces to the Texas Hill Country and from the home of Dakota artist Gwen Westerman in Mankato, Minnesota, to Lincoln, Nebraska, all the way west to the Front Range, there is just something special about a Plains sunset.

Quilts, like this one from Gwen Westerman who descends from six generations of quilters, are transformative art. Layers upon layers of meaning, stitched together in small, precise stitches animated by the breath and prayers of their makers. Quilts are not unique to the Great Plains, but they are celebrated here and still carry deep meaning as honor blankets for Indigenous peoples, entries at county and state fairs, and even prized museum pieces. Each quilt tells a story of the dreams and hopes of its maker, a through line of lineage and place.

Plains Sunset is a remarkable example of a star quilt. In the nineteenth century, after the buffalo herds were decimated, star quilts replaced buffalo robes in ceremony among many Tribes of this region. In the twenty-first century, receiving a star quilt remains the highest symbolic honor in Indian Country.

Plains Sunset is an inspired example of the art and craft of quilting that speaks to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike. *Plains Sunset* embodies the power to both inspire and reveal the promise of uniting all under a single, breathtaking sky or gathering under a cozy quilt on a wintry night.

Beth Ritter, Associate Professor, Anthropology & Native American Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Mona Cliff
Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) tribe (enrolled), Ft. Belknap, MT/Assiniboine/Cayuse
b. 1977, Prescott, AZ

***Past/Presence/Future*, 2020**

Gas mask, seed beads, smoked brain-tanned hide, acrylic paint, Oklahoma red dirt, and matte medium
41 ½ x 10 x 5 inches
Museum purchase through the generosity of Lincoln Community Foundation and BNSF Railway Foundation, 2022.0002.0001
© Mona Cliff. Courtesy of Mona Cliff.

What futures become possible when we stop imagining catastrophe as creeping on the horizon and recognize that we are already building in the aftermath of shattered worlds on lands violently seized from Indigenous peoples? And what if we took seriously that those lands, and the more-than-human relationalities they sustain, are not remnants of a lost world but the material basis for this world—the only world we have?

Aaniiih/Nakota artist Mona Cliff's *Past/Presence/Future* stages that recognition. Where gas masks in contemporary art often signal dystopian futures or generalized environmental crisis, Cliff's work speaks from a world in which "crisis" is not an impending emergency but the latest intensification of an already post-apocalyptic present produced through colonial occupation, land theft, ecological devastation, and the severing of human and more-than-human relations.

Built from a full-face industrial respirator, *Past/Presence/Future* skins the plastic shell with tanned leather, copper-toned seed beads, and Oklahoma red dirt so every surface mediating body and air is routed through Indigenous land. The protruding filters, normally disposable instruments of protection, are fully encased in beadwork Cliff learned from her grandmother. Tinted lenses occlude any specific wearer, allowing the mask to stand in for Indigenous bodies compelled to breathe through poisoned air, while leather fringe spills from the mouthpiece into the space it would otherwise seal, tracing life, breath, and relation across generations—from ancestors and present communities to those yet unborn.

Created in 2020, when a global pandemic stopped the world and Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, the piece sits within overlapping pandemics of COVID-19, antiblack state violence, and the settler-colonial drive to eliminate Indigenous presence and order who is allowed to breathe, survive, and grieve on occupied lands. Rather than offering resolution, Cliff's work holds open the slow practice of living in relation—bead by bead, breath by breath—as the only ground from which any livable future must be made.

Liahnna Stanley (Poarch Band of Creek Indians), Assistant Professor of Indigeneity, Native Studies, and Communication, University of Utah (formerly Assistant Professor, Communication Studies and Ethnic Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln)

Artist unknown

First Greater America Colonial Exposition, circa 1899

Offset lithograph
27 ⅛ x 40 ⅜ inches
Gift of Dr. John and Elizabeth Christlieb, 1980.0258

In 1899, Omaha hosted a celebration of American imperialism. Making use of the plaster structures built for the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in north Omaha, the Greater America Exposition showcased the country's new colonial holdings in the wake of the Spanish-American War. Cuba and the Philippines were prominently featured, including a recreation of Havana's Castillo del Morro and the construction of a "Filipino Village." To facilitate these efforts, organizers imported looted artifacts, native plants, exotic wildlife, and human beings.

As a public historian, much of my research focuses on the relationship between museums and colonialism in the early 1900s. To that end, this poster serves as a striking depiction of how turn-of-the-century museums and festivals supported American imperialism. Behind the euphemistically named "Filipino Village" at the Greater America Exposition was a darker reality—a human zoo of exploited Filipinos tasked with performing for the Omaha crowds. Such displays of non-Western peoples for the gaze of Western audiences were an especially popular form of colonial exhibition.

Human zoos have a long history in both the United States and Europe. While promoted as "authentic" cultural experiences, they were in fact carefully curated. Organizers required their performers to engage in activities that reinforced harmful racial stereotypes and an image of primitiveness. Filipino human zoos, for example, typically relied on two popular racial tropes—head hunting and dog eating. These performances aimed to provide justification for continued colonization by legitimizing the idea that colonized people were not yet civilized enough for self-government.

From a historical perspective, then, this peaceful scene of midday crowds mingling with camels and carabao obscures the violence on display. It also obscured ongoing anticolonial struggles. As visitors meandered through the Greater America Exposition in the summer of 1899, Filipino forces led by Emilio Aguinaldo were actively fighting against American occupation. Their demands included the very self-rule that human zoos and colonial expositions were meant to deny them.

William Stoutamire, Associate Professor, History,
University of Nebraska at Kearney

George Tuck
b. 1942, Amarillo, TX; d. 2023, Lincoln, NE

Two-Room School, Middle Class, from the *Flat Places and Interesting People* series, 1998

Gelatin silver print
8 x 11 ¾ inches
Gift of the artist, 2007.0018.0071
© Great Plains Art Museum. University of Nebraska.

Two-Room School, Middle Class features one of two classrooms in Pleasant View School, Keya Paha County, Nebraska. Tuck captures a class in the midst of a school day—books are out, art decorates the walls, and students interact with their teacher. A familiar classroom scene, albeit with fewer students than at a typical school. Tuck photographs the school in 1998, a moment of transition from Nebraska's, and Keya Paha County's, long-standing system of small local schools to larger, consolidated districts.

Education was a key priority for the white colonists of Keya Paha County. The first school was built in 1885, the year Keya Paha County was created. By the next year, there were 43 schoolhouses, with 1,129 students. Keya Paha County's population peaked at 3,920 in 1890, declining to 769 by 2020. It's no surprise that the number of schools also declined. *The History of Keya Paha County Nebraska: 100 Years: 1885-1985* notes 9 active school districts in 1985.

Nebraska long supported small, rural schools—in 1986, it had 45% of the nation's one-room schools. However, changing demographics forced sweeping changes to K–12 education between 1986 and 2006, resulting in two waves of consolidation. The 2005–2006 school year was the last for districts that, like Pleasant View, didn't have high schools. Keya Paha County now has one school building and under 100 students in its 775 square mile catchment.

It is tempting to see the small school as an idyllic symbol of a simpler time. Pleasant View School, like its one- and two-room peers, gave students a start on their educational journey. However, individualized education and close community ties were balanced by limited opportunities and lack of peers. No system is perfect. Photos like Tuck's illuminate and celebrate the mess of the everyday.

Laurinda Weisse, Associate Professor; University Archivist and Digital Repository Manager, Calvin T. Ryan Library, University of Nebraska at Kearney

It all started in Paul Olson's kitchen. In the mid-1970s, several UNL faculty members met in the UNL English professor's home to discuss creating a regional center dedicated to the study of the Great Plains. The talks bore fruit in 1976 when the University Board of Regents chartered the Center for Great Plains Studies. The Center had a humble beginning in offices housed in Oldfather Hall at the center of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's City Campus. Despite this location, the Center was founded as a four-campus entity, serving UNL, UNO, UNK, and UNMC, and Paul Olson became its first director.

Over the past 50 years, the Center has developed its Fellows program, annual conference, two scholarly journals, book projects, Olson lecture series, and countless projects. Its Great Plains Art Museum connects the community with the art of the region and serves as a gathering place for education and artistic expression.

Learn more about our 50th anniversary:

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