

Flora, Fauna, and Family

A Gladys Lux Retrospective



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September 2-October 14, 2022

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The Family of Gladys Lux, Linda Striman and David Lux

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(Front Cover) Untitled, Portrait of a woman; Oil on linen; signed; 1925.
Lux paints a striking portrayal of an unnamed woman with bobbed hair and clothing of the flapper period. She sits in a dynamic pose with a calm but intense demeanor. This painting earned Lux First Premium Prize at the Nebraska State Fair in 1925.

*The views expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the views of
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Gladys M. Lux

A Nebraska Legacy: Artist, teacher, collector, visionary, philanthropist

A lifelong Nebraska resident, Gladys Lux came from a family of homesteaders and grew up on farms in and around Hall County. Her parents were supportive of her early art interests and even after her mother's untimely death, Lux's father encouraged her to attend the University of Nebraska where she earned an art degree and later a master's degree in art and art history. Through her schooling, her teaching and hard work, she learned how to express herself through oil, watercolor and printmaking. Recognizing her good fortune at the opportunity to attend college, she paid it forward through a 40-year career of teaching at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Lux was head of the art department and for many years the only member of the art faculty. While there, she started an art gallery on campus and organized exhibits of student work.

Having experienced the hardships of the Great Depression and rural living, her art depicted the people and the sometimes-harsh landscape with a keen sensitivity and accuracy. This authentic style won her numerous regional awards and representation in the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. In addition to exhibiting in Nebraska, Lux also showed her art in Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and Texas.

During the Great Depression years, Lux applied for support from the Public Works of Art Project under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Qualification meant subsidies from the government to continue her work as an artist.



She was accepted but then dropped from the program in favor of an artist with greater need. To her disappointment, Lux never received payment for her work.

Despite her setbacks, Lux earned state recognition with a Governor's Arts Award, Mayor's Arts Award and the Distinguished Service Award from the Retired Teachers Association.

Like the farmers in her life, Gladys Lux had faith in the future. In 1984, she purchased the 1914 University Place City Hall and envisioned renovating it to become a place that would strengthen the community and support the work of artists through its exhibitions and programs. A museum on the upper floors would house her own collection of prints, dolls, crafts and her personal artwork. Through this generous gift, she insured what was already a formidable legacy.

After Lux's death in 2003, at the age of 104, the University Place Art Center was renamed the LUX Center for the Arts in her honor.

Gladys Lux spent her life in Nebraska partly because she felt such a strong affinity with its landscape. She believed in her home state's potential and she appreciated its most important asset, the people.

*Biographical Statement by Sharon Kennedy
Image Captions by Susan Soriente and Sharon Kennedy*

(Right) Brown (teapot); Oil on canvas; signed; 1938.
The round reflective containers create a contrast to the vertical lines of the curtain and candlestick. The colorful flowers add liveliness to the breakfast tea table and to the otherwise duskiess of this still life. The painting was exhibited at the Nebraska Artists' Exhibition at the Art Institute of Omaha in 1938.





Untitled, Lilies; Tempera on cardboard; unsigned; undated.
This painting demonstrates Lux's skill at portraying depth and form of the white-gray flowers on a light background.



Untitled, Portrait of a woman with lilies; Oil on linen; signed; 1931.
A dreamlike image of a pensive woman with downcast eyes, surrounded by floating white lilies. The artist unifies the image by repetition of blues and whites.



Untitled, White horse head; Oil on linen; unsigned; undated.
A difficult palette of white and gray is expertly handled. The delicate shading and modeling of the expressive eyes and nostrils depicts a beloved animal.



Shocking; Serigraph, signed; #20/50; 1943.
The warm gold and brown hues give this monochromatic image the feel of an early Dutch painting. Lux portrays herself in the foreground; other family members are in the background. The artist's personal experience sheds light on the heavy physical labor Nebraska families endured.

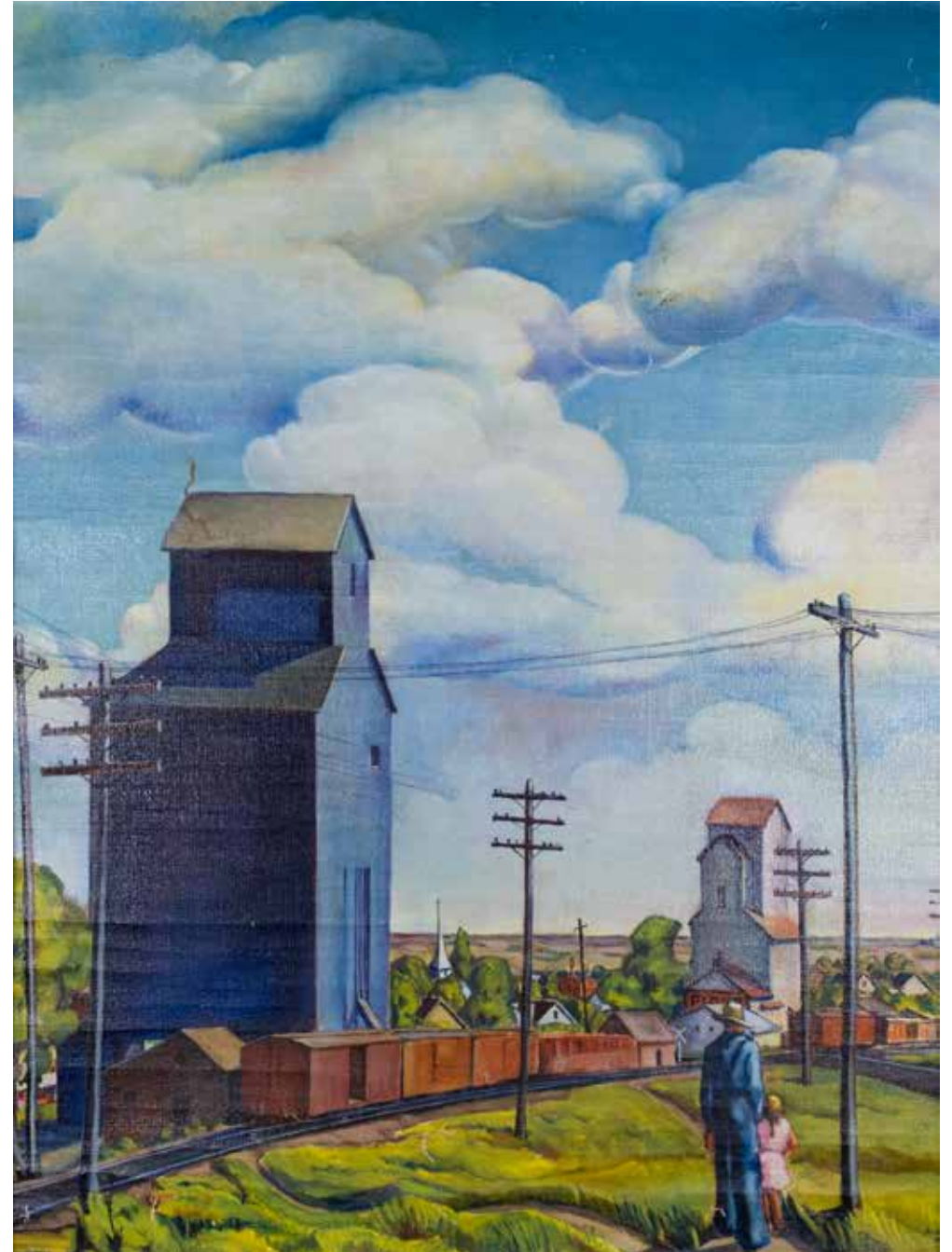


(Above) *Wind in the Willows*; Oil on linen; signed; ca. 1940.

Lux communicates the land's wild and free condition allowing the viewer to sense the wind moving the branches and grasses. The farmer, leaning into the wind, is the artist's father, called Grampy by the Lux family.

(Right) *Prairie Skyline*; Oil on linen; unsigned; 1934-36.

A man and child, said to be Gladys Lux and her father, walk together in the foreground. The elevators and train are angularly and sharply delineated while the town, sky, and clouds in the distance are more softly painted.





Untitled, Red poppies; Oil on linen; unsigned; 1937.
Lux's technique gives a sculptural shaping to the petals and leaves. The poppies' bright red is echoed in the table, vase, and background creating a unified image.



Untitled, Grain Mill; Watercolor; unsigned; undated.
Lux paints in the Regionalist style, an iconic Nebraska structure using geometric planes delineated by shadows and strong lines.



(Above) Untitled, Strawberries; Watercolor; unsigned; ca 1924.
The image is a deftly portrayed impression of fruit after washing, which includes their reflections in the lingering water around them.

(Left) Untitled, Red barns with a fence; Watercolor; unsigned; undated.
The flowing colors in the soil and grass swirl around the sculptural fence posts in the foreground and contrast with the well-defined farm buildings in the background.



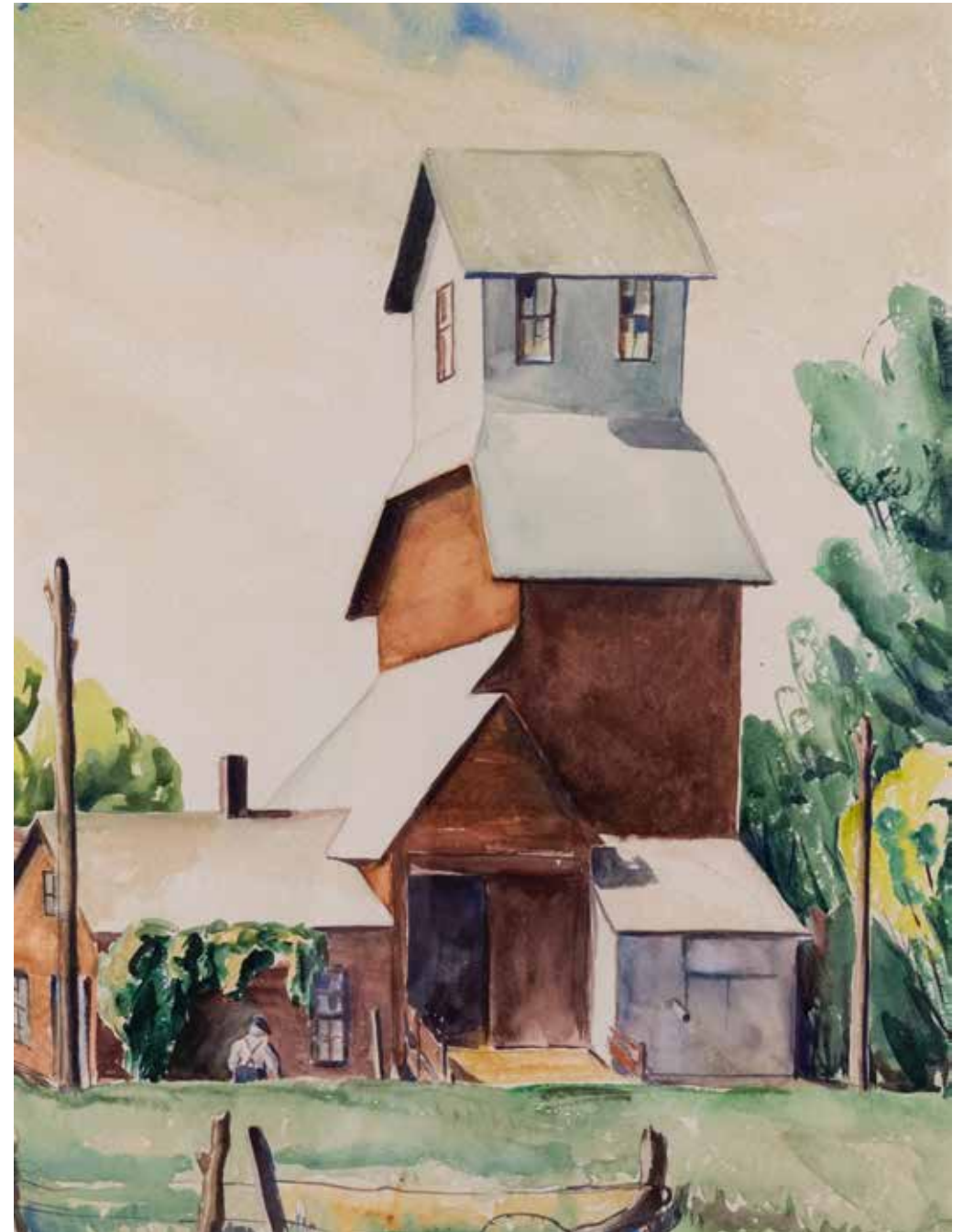
(Above) CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) Camp; Oil on linen; signed; 1934-35.
 Painted near Chadron, Lux captures this deserted camp with its "cookie cutter" shaped buildings, tightly clustered in the landscape. Lux's view from above the camp of smoothly contoured roofs and walls show little detail. The land around the camp also void of humans, is filled with stippled evergreens that dot the rolling hills of northwest Nebraska.

(Left) Untitled, Farm workers; Oil on linen; unsigned; undated.
 An image of a working family is rendered in the style of Mexican muralists—smooth rounded shapes in bright, primary colors fill the painting. Lux experimented with various colors and compositions, as seen in her preparatory sketches for this work.



(Above) Road Gang; Watercolor; unsigned; undated.

Lux is observant of details but also uses impressionistic style in the image. This is one of two paintings Lux submitted to the WPA in 1936, but were not accepted by that program. The subject is unusual for Lux, she possibly chose it to appeal to the leaders of the WPA.



(Right) Untitled, Grain Elevator; Watercolor, Lux stamp on reverse; unsigned; undated.

The elevator is sharply outlined with tight angles and clear shadows, while loose washes of color indicate sky and grass. The barbwire, farmer's suspenders, and other details are meticulously rendered.



Untitled, Shocks of wheat; Oil on linen, unsigned; undated.
The loosely painted shocks may be seen as Lux's interpretation of Monet's Haystacks. Like Monet, she incorporates green, pink, and golden red colors into the straw. While the shocks in the foreground are realistic, Lux shifts to an impressionist style for the remainder of the image.



Spring Turning; Serigraph #50; signed, 1943; eight colors of ink.
A field, recently plowed for spring planting, attracts hungry gulls who hover overhead. The pink blooms define the horizon, and the blue sky is lit with the yellow rays of the sun.



Weeds; Oil on linen; signed; ca 1946.
A typical Nebraska landscape with an open field and distant farmstead. The focus is on the detailed weeds along a barbed wire fence that fill the foreground. Hanging over the scene is an overcast brooding sky.



Untitled, Grain elevator; Watercolor; signed; undated.
Black vertical lines combined with loose brush work create a striking image. Lux condenses the content of her painting into tight space that effectively portrays a small Nebraska town.



Untitled, A snowy rural town; Watercolor; signed; 1938.
The precisely defined snow-covered roofs of houses produces a sense of a crowded town but it is barren of humans. This contrast simultaneously gives the painting a sense of quiet fullness but also a desolate emptiness.



(Left) Untitled, Geraniums;
Watercolor; unsigned; undated.
Seen from an overhead perspective, the angled pot and ruffled fabric add energy and movement to a still life. Lux has a light and informal spontaneity in her brushwork and deftly uses the white of the paper to aid in shaping the flowers.

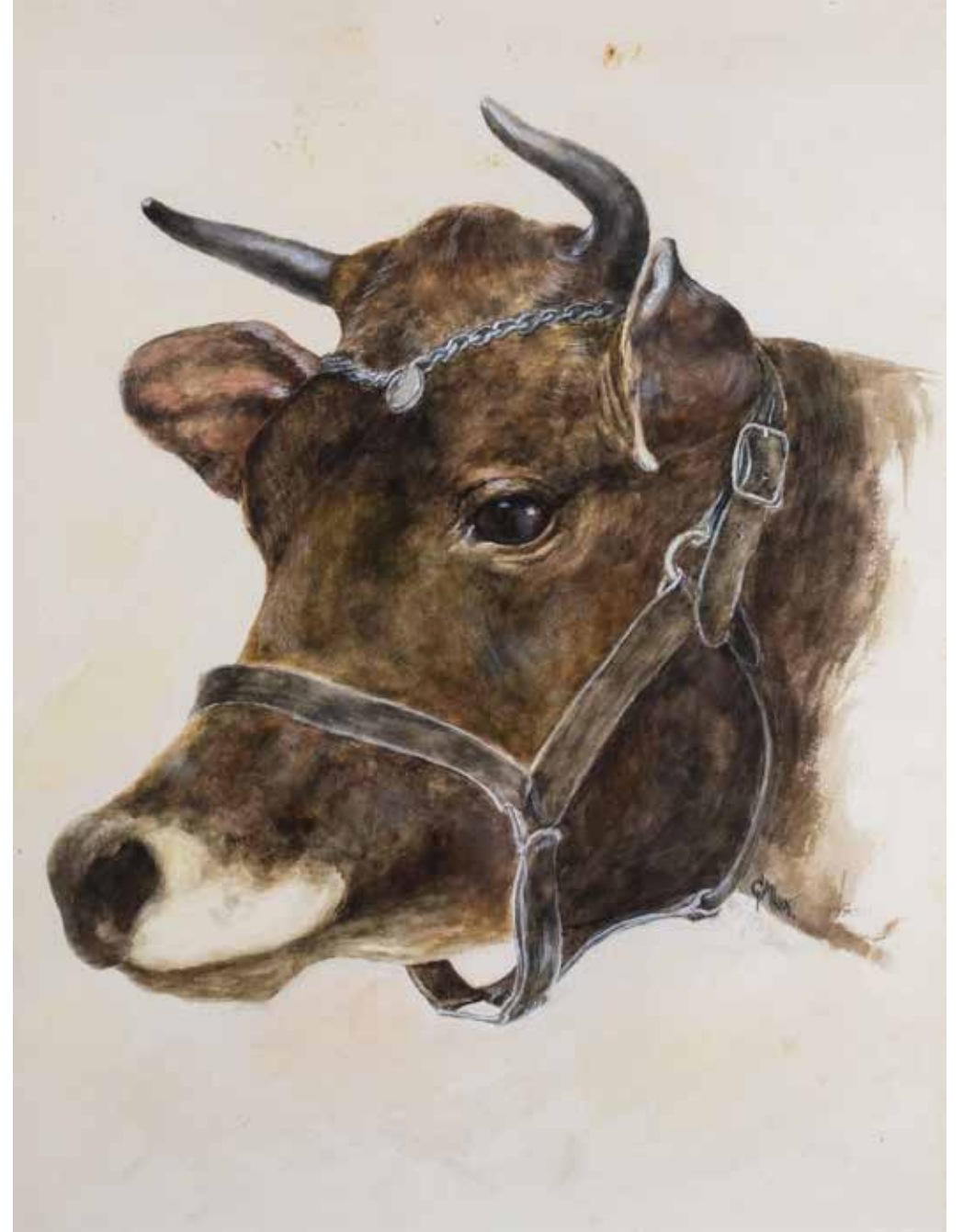
(Above) Nebraska Sky;
Watercolor; signed; 1985.
A loose impressionistic landscape with a strong horizon line dividing the land from a dominating sky filled with rolling clouds.

(Right) Untitled, Portrait of a young woman;
Oil on linen; signed; undated.
This study in silhouette focuses on negative space. The subject's pale skin contrasts with the shadowy background and gives the image a hint of art deco glamor.





(Above) Untitled, Cows in a field; Oil on linen; signed; undated.
The animals exude a sense of mindless power and massive life; the surrounding grass, land, and trees are softened and muted to enhance the focus on the animals.



(Right) Betty; Watercolor; signed; ca. 1939.
A soft brown defines the gentle face of a prized cow, while the white of the paper is skillfully used to provide highlights. Betty belonged to Stan Lux, the artist's nephew. The cow won Grand Champion Yearling in 1939 at the Nebraska State Fair.



(Top Left) *The Horses Go Round*; Watercolor; signed, 1935.

Lux demonstrates her expertise and ability to control the media of watercolor paints in this delightful image of Carolyn, Lux's niece, on a Carousel. The mixture of sharp details and splashes of color capture a moment of movement.

(Right) *That Boy*; Oil on linen; signed; 1936.

This is a portrait of Lux's nephew Stan Lux who posed for the artist when he was 8 or 9 years old. Stan looks squarely into the eyes of the viewer while his teammates play in the background. Comparisons of this painting could be made with Lux's contemporaries, the Regionalist painters, such as Grant Wood.

(Bottom Left) *Treehouse*; Watercolor; signed; 1939.

In this plein air painting, Lux creates sturdy and imposing trees but the flag and large window are the focus and draw in the observer.



The Beginning and the End; Watercolor; signed; October 1935.

Two Lux family members, one older and one younger, sit together doing handwork. The title may reference the young woman learning to quilt and her aged relative who is a lifelong quilter passing on her expertise.



Chess game; Watercolor with pen and ink; unsigned; undated.

The children playing chess are nephews and a niece of Lux (Ron, Stan, John, Ken, and Carolyn). Lux painted the children loosely and spontaneously with sweeping brush strokes. Details are inked in narrow black lines.



Untitled, View from Kitchen Window; Watercolor; unsigned; undated.
The muted colors create a cold and somber winter scene of farm life during a Nebraska winter.

Acknowledgements

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Good Faith; Oil on Canvas; signed; 1939.

This painting was chosen to represent Nebraska at the New York World's Fair in 1939. Lux said of this work, that the Nebraska weather and soil may not favor farming, but the farmer has faith that he will have a crop so he does the hard work of planting. The open undulating fields and hills stretch to the horizon. The vastness of the sky is similarly portrayed. The only signs of human intervention are the buildings and a plow turning the prairie soil. Lux is portraying the formidable might of nature and humanity's constant struggle to survive.



LUX Center for the Arts – West Gallery – September 2-October 14, 2022
2601 N 48th St, Lincoln, Nebraska 68504