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THE ART OF OPEN SPACES

CONTEMPORARY SEA AND PRAIRIESCAPES

ELIZABETH SCHULTZ

*There was a time when the prairie was ocean.
Now the grassy waves roll on an ocean of flint.
Islands of cottonwoods hide in the hollows.
A white foam of yarrow fills the air with its scent.
Is that a seagull or is it a red tail
Up catching the currents, soaring higher and higher?
Is that the billowing sail of a schooner
Or is it the tongues of a wild prairie fire?
Some say midwesterners make the best sailors,
For they love the horizon and the swells in between.
Some leave the wide prairies to sail the deep water.
Some anchor their hearts to a cottonwood tree.*

—Christine Martin (1998)

Key Words: national nostalgia, prairie environment, regional art

Since retiring from the English Department at the University of Kansas as Chancellor's Club Distinguished Professor, Elizabeth Schultz balances her writing on Herman Melville with writing about the environment. She has published "Unpainted to the Last": Moby-Dick in Twentieth-Century American Art; Shoreline: Seasons at the Lake; a collection of co-edited essays on Melville and Women; and a collection of poems, Conversations. She writes a regular column, "Senses of Place," for the Kansas Land Trust newsletter.

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Once part of a great inland sea, Kansas and other Great Plains states have been landlocked for millennia. Yet the prairies' "grassy waves" and "islands of cottonwoods" continue to evoke these ancient waters. Diane Quantic in *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* points out that "[i]t is a rare plains writer who does not invoke the image of the sea of grass, and a rare critic or observer [of the plains] who does not comment upon [this image's] ubiquity."¹ In his index for *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination*, under "Prairie, likened to ocean," Robert Thacker cites twenty entries.² Indeed, comparisons of

prairie to sea by early American writers, such as James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Willa Cather, and Theodore Dreiser, or in the case of Herman Melville, of sea to prairie, are well known. Christine Martin's song, quoted above, as well as Julie Dunlop's poem "Grasslands" (2003), telling us that "The tall grasses golden ripple the way of waters / moving in waves and it is sea here with nowhere to go / but everywhere," testify to the fact that the sea remains a dominant metaphor for contemporary writers who continue to struggle to grasp the prairie's special attributes.³

Contemporary visual artists in their paintings and photographs of the prairie also evoke the sea. However, as Joni Kinsey in *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie* points out, "the favorite literary metaphor for the grasslands—the sea—was of little use to visual artists, with the possible exception of their depictions of prairie schooners, the covered wagons that streamed across the region throughout much of the second half of the nineteenth century."⁴ Although she astutely contends that over time "the land's malleable character" has allowed for shifting cultural interpretations and pictorial representations, Kinsey neglects to note that a number of significant contemporary prairie artists do appear to represent an inland sea. The contrast of recent work by Kansas-connected prairie artists with historical paintings of the Great Plains as well as with maritime paintings past and present illuminates a continuously shared cultural aesthetic between seascapes and prairiescapes as well as a new regional art, which is recognized by critics and shown in galleries and museums throughout the country. It is explicitly through their aesthetic connection with the sea that these contemporary prairie artworks have achieved the status of regional art as defined by Roger Stein:

Regional art is . . . an active strategy of the artistic consciousness to refashion and give shape and structure to the data of local seeing in a way that will communicate with an audience of viewers who live mostly

beyond the aesthetic field and whose premises about life and art are not controlled by their experience of the particular geographical area.⁵

The number of contemporary Kansas prairie artists whose works project an affinity for the sea continues to grow.⁶ Although I refer to many of them, my focus is on six in particular: painters Robert Sudlow, Keith Jacobshagen, Lisa Grossman, and Louis Copt, and photographers Terry Evans and Larry Schwarm, all of whom have been associated with the Department of Art and Design at the University of Kansas since the 1980s, and each of whom has created an extensive body of works depicting the prairie.⁷ Each of these Kansas-connected prairie artists has also exhibited frequently and widely, drawing critical attention to the prairies.

Not only does the work of these Kansas-connected artists present the prairies as being aesthetically intriguing and inspiring—very like the sea—but it also directly challenges continuing perceptions of Kansas' open spaces as flat, drab, and empty, as belonging to the "Great American Desert," a nineteenth-century image which has been propelled into the twenty-first century by Kansas' negative representation in the cinematic version of Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*.⁸ While sociologists Roxanne Fridirici and Stephen E. White demonstrate that the perceptions of Kansans themselves verbally counter such negative images about the state's dominant terrain,⁹ Kansas artists go further in revising these images. I suggest that their experimentation with diverse aesthetic strategies in representing open space succeeds by relating it to a new sublime and a new drama as well as by documenting the prairies' unique environment. As a consequence, the work of these artists creates an ethic of caring about the prairie environment, about its loss and the need for its conservation.

Significantly, as novels that set their narratives on the seas and on the plains have recently reached national prominence,¹⁰ both seascapes and prairiescapes have come to appeal to both elite and popular buyers as

evidenced by sales not only of original works in galleries, but also by reproductions in art fairs, catalogues, and museum shops. This expanding market also argues for a national nostalgia for the open spaces that sea and prairies held for an earlier America. Visually uncluttered with the manifestations of urbanization, industrial maritime culture, and industrial agriculture, these artworks evoke a return to a natural world, representing an idealized past, simple and pristine, swelling with possibilities.

HUMANIZING OPEN SPACE

Historians recognize that the first representations of the sea by Euro-Americans were not of the sea itself but of men and their ships.¹¹ Numerous early American paintings in the form of commemorative portraits of ship captains and the proud ships they sailed were commonplace as signs of prominence and wealth. As the United States took to sea economically and politically, maritime paintings came to focus on the drama of men and their ships. This drama played out in countless representations of men's conflict with a tumultuous and dangerous sea, with the sea's creatures, including sharks and whales, and with each other in naval battle scenes. Nineteenth-century maritime paintings also recorded changes in American life as well as in naval technology, as ships evolved from sail to steam to submarine, and as pleasure boats and yachting became their subject. Often in nineteenth-century paintings, however, a figure was simply posed standing on the shore or seated on a bluff, intently watching the sea or the ships upon it.¹²

A cursory examination of American seascapes also reveals an intensification of a cultural interest in reading the sea for its symbolic implications, an interest manifested in paintings of the sea becoming increasingly abstract. Whereas early American artist John Singleton Copley mythologized the sea in *The Return of Neptune* (c. 1754) through figures clearly delineated to resemble Greek statuary, in the late nineteenth century, developing quite different aesthetic strategies, Albert Pinkham

Ryder and Elihu Vedder, among others, relied on mythological figures to explore the sea's mystery and power.¹³ Thus, the nineteenth-century marine artist, while moving toward abstract representations of the sea, also overtly continued to identify the human perspective as the dominant perspective. However, throughout the nineteenth century, paintings by such diverse and well-known artists as Thomas Cole (*Shipwreck Scene*, 1828, and *Frenchman's Bay, Mount Desert Island*, 1844), Ralph Blakelock (*The Sun, Serene, Sinks into the Slumberous Sea*, n.d.), and Winslow Homer (*The Backrush*, c. 1890, *Prout's Neck, Surf on Rocks*, 1895, and *Early Morning after a Storm at Sea*, 1902)¹⁴ were beginning to suggest that oceanic patterns in and of themselves could prove to be infinite and infinitely fascinating.

Early paintings of the North American interior followed a pattern parallel to paintings of the sea. In nineteenth-century prairie paintings by Euro-Americans, it seemed impossible to represent a prairie horizon without a focal point. While occasionally this eye-catcher was a topographical element, most often it was human (Kinsey 20-21). With the depiction of a Native American encampment, a man on horseback, a wagon train, a homestead, space not only became organized but also humanized (and often made exotic or romantic), as is apparent in George Catlin's early nineteenth-century paintings as well as in later western paintings by such painters as Alfred Jacob Miller, Albert Bierstadt, and Worthington Whittridge. In their works, human beings or human artifacts seemed a prerequisite for both the composition of the paintings as well as for their social and psychological acceptability. Without a human presence, the prairie would appear appallingly empty, inducing agoraphobia. As with early seascapes, drama in early prairie paintings occurred between men and the prairie's creatures, between men (usually Europeans versus Native Americans), or between men and the elements. Fire was represented as being as threatening and terrifying on the prairie as storms were at sea.¹⁵

Catlin, who sought not only to document the activities of Native peoples and to portray

them as individuals, but also to represent the land where they lived and the creatures that inhabited it, created one of the few nineteenth-century prairie landscapes, *Nishnabottana Bluffs, Upper Missouri* (1832), in which space opens outward without interruption and without a human presence, in which he creates, as Kinsey comments, "a view lacking in any compositional definition other than its green grassy horizon and a blue sky" (39). In a notebook entry, Catlin described the experience of painting this site as if he were elevated above the earth and able to span the continent, perceiving the prairies' merging with its coastal waters: "I was lifted up upon an imaginary pair of wings, which . . . held me floating in the open air, from whence I could behold beneath me the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans—the great cities of the East, and the mighty rivers."¹⁶

Whereas the sea had long been associated with European myths and symbols in art and literature, in the nineteenth century the American West came to be associated with myths and symbols—explicitly related to the nation's projects of political expansionism and economic prosperity. The conversion of the desert into a garden and the construction of a tourist industry based on geological marvels exceeding those in Europe were not possible, however, without the "vanishing" or near genocide of Native peoples, the settlement of whites, the advancement of the railroad—subjects of numerous early prairie prints and paintings. However, with the resulting demise of the buffalo, the restriction of many Native peoples to reservations, and the perpetual diminishing of the once boundless prairies due to agriculture and urban settlements throughout the Midwest and the West, artists began to see the prairie as a site of wonder rather than as a void needing to be filled. But like the early maritime painter, the prairie painter was also conscious of the single individual engaged in reflection upon nature's sweeping canvas. In Laura Gilpin's 1917 photograph titled *On the Prairie*, a solitary figure seems like a sail on the sea of grass. Gilpin's photograph is named for a similarly titled poem by Eliza Morgan Swift, in

which the last line of the poem's four stanzas invokes the sea, as the stanza below indicates:

There's a wind on the prairie
That sends the clouds sailing,
Their long tresses trailing,
With the blustering swirl of the wind on
the lea;
And the waves of the grasses,
In sweeping blue masses,
Are brothers akin to the waves of the sea.¹⁷

In the same year as Gilpin's iconic photograph, however, Georgia O'Keeffe also created two watercolors, *Light Coming on the Plains I* and *Light Coming on the Plains II*, both of which eliminate even this lone human sail. O'Keeffe's works imagine a prairie in terms of space soaring upward into a dome of vibrant color. In 1921, in a photograph that she titled *The Spirit of the Prairie*, Gilpin, too, eliminated the human figure, creating an image of sky and land in which waves appear to be scrolling across the land beneath a vast sky.

RECREATING OPEN SPACE

With the increase in human populations and human traffic on both land and sea in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, the convention for artists to conjure a human marker within wide open space is not as compelling now as it was for their predecessors. A natural void has become a rarity, prompting a yearning for the illusion of endless, uninterrupted space, a nostalgia for the natural world, manifested as an original vastness, open to all possibilities. Artists of contemporary seascapes and prairiescapes are fulfilling this yearning through the development of a new aesthetic of open space. Thus, despite their borders and rectilinearity, these works appear without limits, extending toward infinitude. Some artists seem to fuse the settings of sea and prairie indistinguishably. Jane Wilson's canvases, in which light-suffused bands of colors appear to flow through space, might be contemplations of either sea or prairie. Her titles, such as

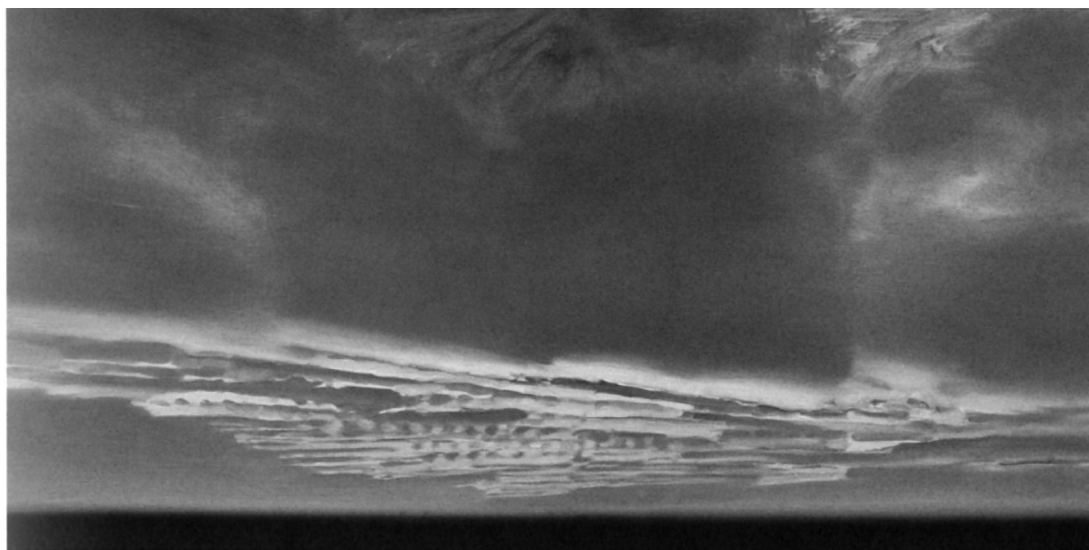


FIG. 1. Lisa Grossman, *In the Luminous Air*, 2002. Oil on panel, 20 × 40 inches. Private collection.

Moon at Dusk, *Remains of a Stormy Day*, and *Light at Dawn* (all painted in 2000), alluding to weather or the time of day, emphasize a vision of the ever-changing and -expanding elemental world in which human beings are inconsequential. Similarly, Rodney Troth creates a sense of infinite space in his paintings through glowing multicolored horizontal stripes. Despite his expressed commitment to painting on location in Kansas's Flint Hills, the uninhabited and abstract space in his paintings can be interpreted as depicting the sea as well as the prairie.¹⁸

Contemporary prairie painters, however, confess explicitly to erasing the human imprint from their landscapes. They often work to contrive an absence—one that resembles a sense of emptiness suggested in contemporary seascapes—and thereby to create new responses to space and light. In 1979, Robert Sudlow, who mentored several of the Kansas-connected artists I discuss at the University of Kansas, and who, now in his eighties, continues to be a vigorous and illuminating prairie painter, wrote, “[On the prairies] the comforting scale of man disappears, and everything is filled with nuance and change under great skies and unbroken

horizons.”¹⁹ In his focus on the nuances of the prairie in his paintings, Sudlow admits to overlooking buildings or power lines.²⁰ Of her paintings, which reflect her proactive environmental concern, Grossman says, “I see my work as a sustained meditation on open spaces, as a celebration of their sublime beauty, as an expression of my deep concern for their survival.”²¹ Thus, she consciously constructs her paintings as alternatives to the cacophony and confusion of contemporary lives dominated by technology,²² and in her paintings she looks beyond human manifestations to an evocation of the sublime in space and light. As *Kansas City Star* art reviewer Kate Hartman notes, “A sense of timeless essence is furthered by the fact that Grossman leaves out any evidence of human presence. Telephone wires and architectural structures are overlooked in her desire to focus exclusively on the natural landscape.”²³ In such paintings as *In the Luminous Air* (2002) (Fig. 1), *Wind-swept*, *Silver-blue* (2002), and *Gentle*, *Falling Light* (2003), Grossman's canvases, void of human presence, pulsate with shifting and glowing light. In celebrating the prairies' “sublime beauty,” she and other prairie painters revise the eighteenth-century concept



FIG. 2. Keith Jacobshagen, *Crow Call (Near the River)*, 1990-91. Oil on canvas, $46\frac{3}{16} \times 80\frac{1}{8}$ inches (117.32×203.52 cm.). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Museum purchase made possible through the generosity of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nelson Gallery Foundation, F91-12.

of *The Sublime*, which acknowledged “the unmediated power of Deity in the universe, emphasizing obscurity, indefiniteness, the immeasurable, the uncontained and uncontrolled” (Stein, 18).²⁴ In contemporary prairie-escapes, it is the illusion of endless empty space in sky and land and the diffusion of light in this space that replace evocations of divinity.

When a human signifier exists in the open space of recent marine and prairie paintings, it appears diminished, thereby aggrandizing the natural setting. Thus, in one of O’Keeffe’s rare sea paintings, *Wave* (1928), a pinpoint of light from a distant lighthouse provides a fulcrum for the dark ocean, which radiates out from it. In other contemporary seascapes, a minute swimmer or a distant sail may serve to unlock space, opening it to the viewer. In Keith Jacobshagen’s vistas of fields and plains, a miniature house or barn, a tree or swatch of fire appear as humble tokens. In works such as *Crow Call (Near the River)* (1990-91) (Fig. 2), these minute tokens of human connection ground his panoramas, serving as the means for ushering the viewer

into their deep space and guiding her through their extensive horizontality.²⁵ Challenged to open the flat canvas to the spatial depths of oceans or prairies, some marine and prairie artists may accentuate distance and infinity by creating an intersection between a shore or a road and the horizon. Having the effect of traditional perspective devices, shore and road appear to run to meet the sky, hurrying the viewer along with them, as in Jon Friedman’s *White Light* (2002), Sudlow’s *Road to the Sky* (1991), and Jacobshagen’s *Cooling in July* (1997).

In most recent marine and prairie paintings, space, aesthetically shaped by natural phenomena other than by the human presence, remains pristine and undefiled. The horizon is the principal shaping force in these works. It neatly divides the canvas into equal portions of pure sea and sky, for example, in Jeffrey Blonder’s *From Dun Medhonach 24* (2002) and Pat de Groot’s *Blue Sea* (2003). Horizons appear longer and perhaps more limber in the predominantly horizontal paintings of contemporary

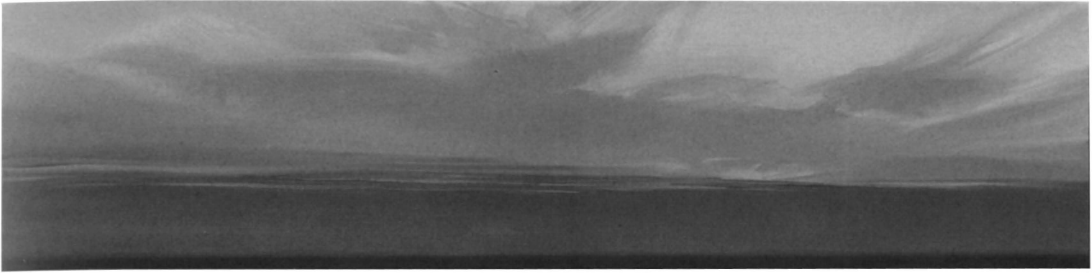


FIG. 3. Lisa Grossman, *Horizontal Variations—Konza in October, 2003*. Oil on canvas, 12 × 48 inches. Private collection.

grasslands painters. In their panoramic horizontality, Jacobshagen's paintings literally embody the prairie's vastness. They sweep across walls, with space-defining horizons cutting through them, separating green land from blue sky, as in *Dog Days (Platte River)* (1989). The horizons of other prairiescapes, as in Margaret Morris's *Big Sky* (2003), Copt's *Flint Hills, Sunrise* (2002), and Grossman's *Horizontal Variations—Konza in October* (2003) (Fig. 3), if not as extensive as Jacobshagen's, are no less absolute in shaping space, in determining the division of elements, and in contributing to a projection of vastness. The horizon, however, is not always stable in contemporary prairiescapes. Morris's *Kansas* (2004), for example, tilts, and given this prairie painting's eccentric verticality as well as the slanting brushstrokes in both earth and sky, the usually placid prairiescape appears to streak out of its frame. Grossman's gentle diagonal horizon in *Clearing to the North* (2000), however, suggests gradual movement, whereas Paul Hotvedt's swelling horizon in *Wabunsee County Landscape* (2004) evokes the sea's easygoing rollers.

The horizon also assists in constructing a universe in cross-section. In both horizontal and vertical sea and prairie paintings, it may contribute to the effect of creating a cosmic geology in which layers of earth and sky appear stacked. In seascapes, a sequence of parallel lines may suggest shore, surf, deepening water, and dark night or cloud-filled sky, as in Mary Heilmann's vertical *Waimea* (1995) and Friedman's horizontal *Surf and Sandbars* (2003). In prairiescapes, different strata project fields striped the colors of earth, grain, and

trees with streaks of sunset and clouds above them. Several of Copt's 2002 paintings—*Burnt Prairie*, *Flint Hills Sunrise* (Fig. 4) and *Lecompton Valley, Winter*—appear banded. In *Flint Hills Sunrise*, the sky is streaked with regal colors of orange, gold, deep purple, and pale amber above bands of dark earth, while *Lecompton Valley, Winter* foregrounds the snow's pale shades, with bands of dark trees intercepting them midway and a spectrum of pastels moving upward to a cool blue. Grossman weights *Horizontal Variations—Konza in October* with a line of darkness running across the bottom. Striations of color cross through the center of the painting; they are dispersed into clouds in the painting's higher reaches, seeming to dissolve the upper edge of the canvas. In these striated paintings of sea and prairie, space appears to recede, and as a result of the paintings' layered patterns, distance and depth become more intimate.

In the late nineteenth century, conventional maritime paintings of ships existed side by side with more abstract explorations of the sea by Homer and Ryder. While these artists depicted the actual forms of rocks and waves, elements of abstraction—the energy of lines, the relationship of forms, and the texture of paint—became areas for contemplation and investigation. In the twentieth century, John Marin and Milton Avery propelled these investigations further by creating numerous seascapes characterized by abstract possibilities involving the vigor of line and color and the flattening of space. Marin's statement, "The sea that I paint may not be the sea, but it is a sea,



FIG. 4. Louis Copt, *Flint Hills Sunrise*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 11 × 14 inches. Private collection.

not an abstraction,” emphasizes the permeability of abstraction and realism in the creation of modern seascapes.²⁶ The generic titles of Avery’s paintings, such as *The White Wave* (1956) and *Tangerine Moon and Wine Dark Sea* (1959), and of Marin’s, such as *Sea, Dark Green and Yellow* (1921) and *The Written Sea* (1952), indicate their removal from cartographic reference.

Separated from identifying land markers and focused on the open expanse of the sea, contemporary sea and prairie paintings are liberated from conventional realism to become purely elemental. Through the power of the horizon, they veer toward the minimalism and abstraction of Mark Rothko’s pioneering color-field paintings. Recent seascapes by Clemins, Blondes, and de Groot, which dramatically juxtapose sea and sky, show their kinship with Rothko’s blocks of colors. In their works, the horizon allows for the contrast of the sea and

sky primarily in terms of texture and pattern, with the sea’s surface roughed up, simultaneously watery and woolly, and set off against the sky’s smooth vacuity. As studies in contrasting patterns, space in these seascapes is illusory, suggested through the artists’ meticulous attention to the waves’ patterns, but denied by the sky’s flatness.

In moving toward minimalism and abstraction, contemporary paintings and photographs of the prairie project an elemental power, while showing greater diversity than contemporary seascapes. They may present an imagined landscape of stark puritanical simplicity, of transcendental sublimity, an epic struggle between opposing forces or a sensual dreamscape. Photographer Schwarm, however, claims always to begin from a specifically Kansas minimalist perspective. He explains, “No matter where I am, no matter



FIG. 5. Larry Schwarm, *Grass and burned field*, Lyon County, Kansas, 1991. Color photograph, 29 × 29 inches. Permission of the artist.

what I'm looking at, my point of reference is the minimalist landscape of Kansas where I first observed the world."²⁷ Like contemporary maritime artists, Kansas artists—both painters and photographers—have been inspired by the prairie's ostensibly minimalist landscape to recreate the earth and sky in Rothko-like blocks, relying on the horizon to establish contrasts in light, color, and texture. In their works, earth and sky may share the picture equally,

with a duality established between them and emphasized by the horizon. They may appear complementary—even as static. In Evans's *Chase County* (1971) and Schwarm's *Grass and burned field, Lyon County, Kansas* (1991) (Fig. 5), earth and sky are in harmonious balance. In both photographs, a light blue sky of tranquil clouds is balanced by a field of golden grass. A burned and blackened border between sky and earth in Schwarm's photograph is the primary



FIG. 6. Larry Schwarm, *Light from the fire near Chase County Lake, Kansas*, 2000. Color photograph, 29 × 29 inches. Permission of the artist.

differential between the two photographs. Static but also mystical, two winter scenes, Jacobshagen's *Snow Field* (2003) and Schwarm's *Snow, Greenburg, Kansas* (1989), present nearly equal blocks of whiteness with the horizon permitting a subtle shift in the pastel colorations in the white earth and sky.

However, the horizon's division of the prairie world between earth and sky may also establish a dualism so dynamic as to suggest a mythic

antithesis between nature's elemental and powerful oppositions. In Schwarm's photographs of the burning or burned prairie, the contrast becomes dramatic: in *Burned pastures at dusk, Chase County, Kansas* (1999), for example, he projects the sky's soft bands of color in opposition to charred grassland, and in *Light from the fire near Chase County Lake, Kansas* (2000) (Fig. 6) the sky's intense purple, vibrates in contrast to the grass's glowing roseate color.

In Jacobshagen's, Grossman's, and Copt's work, the equation between earth and sky is often unequal, with the sky usually proving to be the more powerful force, capable of overwhelming the earth with its benign placidity or its unanticipated ferocity. Although prairie paintings have always shared the sky with marine paintings, prairie painters have recently claimed the sky to reestablish a sense of original wonder. Uninterrupted by mountains on the one hand and buildings on the other, the sky appears in all its glory in these works. By permitting the sky to dominate, these Kansas artists create an enlarged and often elevated natural prospect from which earth may be examined. Such a prospect, imbued with light and the drama of clouds, allows earth beneath to be interpreted in several ways—as an intimate and cherished place, or as a darkened and threatened place, for example. In works in which sky prevails over land, which is often depicted as immobile, monochromatic, and minimalist, it is as if the sky has opened up to allow viewers to believe in infinite possibilities again. Thus, while the sky in works by Clemins and de Groot is empty and vague, prairie painters reach for extravagant effects. Of the sky in Jacobshagen's paintings, Kinsey writes that

the celestial element becomes the defining element in the work, leading the gaze through orthogonal cloud formations toward the tiny trees and structures that lie deep in the extended space. . . . [His] stratospheric effects are the structural foundations of his images and, indeed, of the landscapes he turns to for inspiration. As they lift the gaze, they simultaneously elevate the prospect, placing the viewer metaphorically somewhere between earth and sky, looking across the land from a floating perspective that ambiguously exposes the constructed identity of the view at the same time that it beguiles with its apparent veracity. (196)

In Grossman's paintings, the sky is suffused with light. In addition to suggesting their contemplative intent, her titles—*The Intense*

Serene, Airlight, Gently Falling Light, In the Luminous Air, or Wind-Swept, Silver-Blue—imply the sky's ineffable qualities. Rather than specifying any particular setting, her paintings move not simply toward abstraction, but toward the sublimity of light and the possibilities for a renewed sense of wonder in the world that this light reveals.

Light in these contemporary prairiescapes is activated in several ways to assure such revelation. It is not blinding but reveals subtleties of shade and shadow. Interacting with clouds, it is the source of celestial drama. Clouds inscribe the sky, perform complex choreography, bloom, quiver. In such paintings as Jacobshagen's *Crow Call (Near the River)*, Grossman's *Sunset Flaring* (2001), and Copt's *Yard Light* (2001), high drama emerges as a flamey, flowing sky of clouds, in multiple shapes and colors, rising up from a concrete, solid, stable earth. Antitheses such as these create a compositional tension in these paintings, with the soaring sky apparently lifting the painting out of the frame, while the earth continues to ground it intimately within the frame. Usually it is the day's turning that determines the sky's changing, but as the towering clouds in Copt's *Vulcan's Anvil* (2002) (Fig. 7) or in Grossman's *Thunderhead* (2002) suggest, the prairie's bizarre weather also contributes to high drama among the clouds.

Shifting light, especially along the horizon, whether from the sun or a temperature change, disturbs the geometry created by the horizon's dominance in contemporary prairiescapes. Although the prairie horizon typically provides a clear demarcation between land and sky, light from the sky disturbs the land, implying an elemental interaction between air and earth. In many of Grossman's paintings, the horizon is softened with light, especially when it appears to be departing from the dark land or just arriving. Light along the horizon in her works may also burn incandescently and glow with intense color. In some prairiescapes, it may create a liminal space, as in Evans's *Storm, Concordia* (1980), in which a luminous line separates a grey sky from a ruffled field of grass, or it may generate the illusion that earth and



FIG. 7. Louis Copt, *Vulcan's Anvil*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 30 × 40 inches. Collection of the artist.

sky merge, obfuscating the horizon altogether, as in Grossman's lithograph *Prairie Night* (2002).

In some prairiescapes, however, earth challenges the sky's dominance. For the first Europeans who viewed the continent's inner grasslands and wrote about them, as well as for subsequent writers, the land's long low hills and rippling green grasses were responsible for evoking the illusion of unending oceanic waves. Jacobshagen testifies to the motion of the mid-western landscape, claiming that although it "is perceived to be flat, . . . it really isn't. There is subtle undulation to it."²⁸ Sudlow believes that "[t]he prairie hills still retain qualities of the ancient seas. There are ground swells and subtle vapors hardly noticed by the rider on the turnpike. Forms dissolve and distance hovers

near and far according to light shifts" (34). Sudlow's painting technique—frequently identified as impressionistic—gives a gentle fluidity to the land. In *Chase County Grasslands* (1992), for example, the earth's topography becomes as densely patterned and stitched as waves. His 1984 tondo, *Valley Sundown* (Fig. 8), might be a view through a porthole. In contrast to the works of Jacobshagen, Copt, and Grossman, the earth in Sudlow's works may rise up into the picture, swelling and rolling with crests and troughs. The horizon, which usually appears in prairiescapes as a firm, straight line, parallel with the painting's frame, wavers in Sudlow's paintings, with the land taking on qualities of the undulating sea.

Contemporary aesthetic conventions for defining open space—of representing the



FIG. 8. Robert Sudlow, *Valley Sundown*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 44 inches diameter. Private collection.

sea in terms of water and sky and the prairie in terms of earth and sky with the horizon separating these elements—coincides with a national nostalgia for open space and has resulted in the iconization of the images of sea and prairie. Their proliferation for sale not only in galleries but also in catalogues and museum shops suggests their commercial popularity in several markets. It is not surprising that these aesthetics have resulted in parodies of both sea and prairiescapes by quite well-known but disparate national and Kansas artists, in which land and sea, earth and sky, are simply divided by a straight line on a flat canvas. Roy Lichtenstein's comic *Seascape* (1964) is a sandwich of flat stripes—between a stiff black band and a stiff red band are undulating bands of grey, yellow, yellow dotted with

red, and red dotted with yellow. According to Klaus Kertess, Lichtenstein's work "gleefully mocks the seabound strokes of his forebears and pseudo-mechanically mimics the clichéd sentimentality of the postcard sunset."²⁹ In *L'Etoile de Verre* (1965), Man Ray appears to project an oceanic scene: above the horizon, a single star—a glass diamond—shines; below it Ray creates a reflected beam in a serene sea. However, *L'Etoile de Verre* is an assemblage of glass and sandpaper, despite any romantic associations conjured up by its French title. Here the horizon seems drawn with a ruler, with the stream of light on the sandpaper sea cast by the star altogether illusory.

In different media, Kansans Joelle Ford, Peter Thompson, and Rachel Sudlow also mock the popularization of prairie paintings. Ford's 2003 acrylic painting *Varied Terrain* spoofs the horizon as the prairiescape's defining aesthetic convention. In a bold and zany script, she prints the word "LANDSCAPE" across a horizon separating two rectangles of muted beige and brown. The archaic light fastened to the upper frame of *Varied Terrain* illuminates Ford's multilayered joke, implying that electricity might provide more light than the sky, and that even when the light is on, the Kansas landscape may indeed be a desert. Thompson's 2003 digital photograph *Clinton Dam* (Fig. 9) flattens depth and distance into an immaculate pattern: the horizon here cleanly divides an empty blue sky above from what appears to be the earth below. It projects the stark simplicities of many prairie paintings, yet the titlé reveals the photograph's actual subject to be the dam for a Kansas county reservoir. That Thompson's subject is a Kansas dam does not mitigate the dramatic contrast between the layers of soft clouds above and the unyielding structure below them. Rachel Sudlow, the granddaughter of Robert Sudlow, also plays up and plays with the sense of contrast between the sky and a textured surface below in her large (29 1/2 × 29 1/2 inches) glossy photographs. Committed to environmental education and photographing solely in rural Kansas, Sudlow enjoys using humor to startle her viewers. Thus



FIG. 9. *Peter Thompson, Clinton Dam, 2003. Archival print, 9 × 14 1/2 inches. Collection of the artist.*

her surfaces deceive the viewer, who mistakes the backs of cows, their hairs simulating grass, their musculature undulating land, for rumpled prairies and scruffy slopes. In her series of *Cowscapes*, she “merges common Midwest symbols to create a vast new world that reflects the natural prairie of my home,” intending through her work to elevate “a lowly, domestic animal bred and raised mainly for consumption” to “the level of sublime landscapes by being pushed into the high art setting of a vibrant, detailed photograph.”³⁰

UP CLOSE AND ON HIGH: OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Both marine and prairie artists are also identified with a site-specific, realistic tradition of painting. The works of marine painter Eric Hopkins, for example, are explicitly associated with his home state of Maine, and all of Friedman’s works emerge from the beach outside his studio door in Truro on Cape Cod.

Both artists, although frequently challenging conventional points of view in their paintings, ground their seascapes to land that is well known to them. Often the presence of a particular topographical feature of land—an island, a beach, a harbor, a rocky bluff—secures a vast sea and provides the contemporary maritime painting with, in Shakespeare’s words, “a local habitation and a name.”

Several prairie artists, in addition to their more abstract works of sky and earth, focus intently on the specific characteristics of the prairie landscape—its particular geology and unique ecosystem—in the interests of calling attention to its special aesthetic features. For prairie photographer Schwarm, the ostensibly empty landscape of his boyhood home in south-central Kansas taught him “to look very carefully.”³¹ Copt, a longtime Kansas resident, is alarmed by the rapid pace of changes occurring in rural Kansas. Consequently, anticipating changes to the present-day landscapes with which he is intimately familiar, in paintings

such as *Lecompton Valley Winter* and *View of Palco* (2004) he explicitly defines his art as a documentary of the Kansas countryside as he sees it now.³²

The place-specific titles of recent prairie paintings establish expectations for a realistic representation that not only relates to particular prairie sites but instructs viewers in the astonishing particularities of these places. Of the thirty-two prairie artists in "Homage to the Flint Hills: A Gathering of Art Inspired by the Tallgrass Prairie of Kansas" (2004), eighteen linked their works through their titles with a particular place, naming them after a county, nearby town, or characteristic geographical feature of the terrain; others associated their works with an explicit season or time of day. Jacobshagen's titles frequently relate a painting to a precise place as well as to a precise time, as if his paintings are pages from a nautical log book or a personal journal in which, by the very fact of his recording such ordinary events, they are transformed into extraordinary incidents. His titles indicate where he was when he was eating pie or riding a motorcycle, when flies were biting or crows flying. For example, one of Jacobshagen's paintings is titled *Farm Lights and Power Poles near Nebraska City—Platte River Valley in the Afternoon—January Thaw 47°—Hot Coco from a Thermos—Aroma of Food Cooking in the Evening Air* (1988). The full title for his *The Road to Roca* (1989) includes the following descriptive details: *19th July 1989—83 Light Wind from the North—Stopped to Visit Starik—He Now Counts 47 Cats in the Yard—Cold Beer on the Porch Watching the Moon Come Up in the Salt Valley—Lights from Roca & Coal Trains; East of Wahoo on the Way to the Platte River—July 11, 1989—Hot and Humid with Flies Biting*.

Given the particularized interest of Evans, Copt, and Schwarm, in the annual controlled burns by ranchers in Kansas's Flint Hills, it might be assumed that their works project realistic illustrations of the burning prairie. However, in focusing on this important seasonal, agricultural practice in which people work with the elements to nurture the prairie,

Evans's and Schwarm's photographs and Copt's paintings of fire's different moods reveal not only oceanic possibilities in contemporary prairiescapes but also, through a range of astonishing abstract patterns, introduce viewers to a significant prairie ritual. As Robert Adams implies in his introduction to Schwarm's photographs, fire adds "the missing fourth element" to images that reveal "a seascape of earth and air."³³ For Copt, painting fire is like "trying to paint light itself."³⁴ During the nineteenth century when the devastating effects of sea storms on men and ships were often the subject of maritime paintings, landscape painters such as Catlin, Paul Kane, and Meyer Straus depicted the similarly devastating effects of fire on men and animals as it raced untrammelled across the prairies (Kinsey 41-43). Such scenes, made terrifying by a human presence, no longer have a place among contemporary representations of either the sea or the prairie. Although Evans, Schwarm, and Copt may acknowledge the potential danger and destruction of prairie fire, their works focus on fire's diverse and incandescent aesthetic patterns, revealing the prairies astonishingly transformed. Their recognition of fire's transformative power through their attention to its changing colors and shapes—its flames, smoke, cinders, ash—implies their recognition of its role in the cycle of natural regeneration for prairie soil and plants.

Commenting on his collection of photographs of the controlled burns on Kansas prairies in *On Fire* (2003), Schwarm explains, "I never intended to document the fires in the strictest sense of the word, but rather to capture every essence of them, from calm and lyrical to angry and raging. I discovered the fires' subtleties and abstractions as spirituality. . . . These qualities, both quiet and other-worldly, form what I see as the sublime and mystical character of the burning landscape, where images are at once both sensuous and menacing."³⁵ In Schwarm's photographs, prairie fire becomes fluid: it flows like waves in *Fire lines, Chase County, Kansas* (1990), rolls in like surf in *Line of fire, Chase County, Kansas* (1991), or its flames dash like spray up into the sky in



FIG. 10. Louis Copt, *Prairie Nightfire*, 2004. Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 inches. Private collection.

Fire on Highland Ranch, Chase County, Kansas (1996). Copt sets the entire sky on fire in *Prairie Nightfire* (2004) (Fig. 10) and *Burning in the Night* (2004), or as smoke moves up into the sky in *Sunset Flames with Full Moonrise* (2004), he displays striations of deep color—crimsons, violets, ultramarine. Schwarm's final photograph in *On Fire, New grass about two weeks after burning, Chase County, Kansas* (1996) (Fig. 11), is placed following his own and Adams's statements. As if beyond comment, this photograph shows the natural miracle of a restored prairie, densely green with its deeply shadowed troughs, filling space as it reaches like an inland sea to the sky.

The intricacy of ocean waves, which fascinated earlier marine artists such as Homer, and modern abstractionists such as Jackson Pollock in *Phosphorescence* (1947) and *Full Fathom Five* (1947), has also intrigued contemporary marine artists. In what Kertess calls her "hyper-precise renderings of the ocean's surface" (17), the meticulous waves in Clemins's minimalist drawing *Untitled (Big Sea #1)* (1969) appear

as if comprised of infinite pixels. "Clemins' obsessive poetics," Kertess believes, simultaneously reveal the "rote, absurd, and joyous acts of making." Friedman's waves by contrast, in his realistic *Troughs and Rollers* (2003), may be joyous as well as voluptuous and exuberant, but are hardly mechanical. Both Clemins and Friedman have looked out far, as well as in close, to explore the sea's infinitely repetitive and changing patterns.

Similarly, prairie artists have also looked in close. As marine artists Clemins and Friedman reveal their fascination for the surface of the sea, prairie artists examine the precise properties and patterns of prairie grasses and flowers. In her early prairie photographs, Evans took special care to identify these species, from both long range in *Bluestem Grassland, Chase Country, Kansas* (1979) as well as close to hand. Her 1978 and 1979 photographs of plants—for example, of *Daisy fleabane*, *asters*, *mixed prairie grasses*, and *cheat grass*, *Fent's Prairie, Salina, Kansas*, of *Goldenrod*, *leadplant*, and *compass plant*, and of *Blue wild indigo*—appear as wild



FIG. 11. *Larry Schwarm, New grass about two weeks after burning, Chase County, Kansas, 1996. Color photograph, 29 × 29 inches. Permission of the artist.*

tangles that draw the viewer into mysterious convolutions. Resembling the abstract representations of the sea in the intricate coilings of a Pollock marine painting or the minutiae of a Clemins's drawing of waves, Evans's close-up photographs of grasses and flowers tangled together also accurately reflect precise botanical species. However, even as she focuses her lens on the prairie's surface, Evans sees a relationship between its finite plants and infinite spaces:

One day in April I took a picture of some sage coming through the grass, and the

plants were in a sort of spiral configuration of sage, old straw grass, and new grass. As I looked at the photographic image later, the sage looked like stars and the grass like a galaxy, and suddenly I realized that the sky was a part of the prairie too.³⁶

As marine artists might depict the diverse underwater ecosystems in the ocean in relation to the ocean's surface and shore,³⁷ Evans and Copt seek to instruct viewers in the extensive root systems of prairie plants. They make visible the complicated underground life, in particular, of big and little bluestem grasses,

among the oldest and the largest of all living organisms, plants that show only 15 percent of their total mass aboveground. With no horizon in these works, the sky is represented through the linear stalks of grass. Showing the prairie in cross-section, Evans's and Copt's works reveal not only its depth and complexity but also, in Melville's words, its mysterious "little lower layers." These paintings, which recognize the specificity and reality of the prairies' rituals and flora, complement those that focus on their abstract panoramic possibilities: while ostensibly documenting aspects of a singular ecosystem, the prairie painters and photographers reveal the natural wonders of these common grasslands and transform them into art that is startling and mysterious.

Both marine and prairie artists have experimented with aerial views in their works.³⁸ As a marine artist, Hopkins presents a bird's-eye view of the ocean shaping the planet's lyrical curve. The horizon becomes an arc. Created in sweeping brush strokes and bright blues, his aerial perspective in *Flying Over Harbor Island III* (1986) places clouds as islands floating in the sky and islands as clouds floating in the sea. As prairie artists, both Grossman and Evans have also shifted from the zoom lens to the telescopic and aerial. From cliffs and bluffs, Catlin was the first to discover the advantage of an elevated perspective for representing prairie space, whereas Grossman and Evans have had the advantage of airplanes to capture their aerial plains pictures. For both artists, while the commitment to honoring the land through attention to patterns and spatial perspective has been retained in their aerial works, the horizon no longer is a critical component for organizing the visual experience of the prairie. Expressing the relationship between her close-up photographs and her aerial vistas, however, Evans writes, "When I photographed the prairie from a plane at about 1,000 feet, I was amazed at how similar the macro and the micro patterns were" (14). With the signs of human cultivation incorporated into these patterns and thus once more revealed as critical to representation of the prairie, Evans shows

the prairie landscape as reinhabited.³⁹ *Smokey Valley village site, circa 1000 to 1500, Saline County* (1992), for example, is a photographic palimpsest, exposing the site of a former Native American village in relation to a river's changing course. The patterns in other works, such as *Weapons Range* (1990), *Terraced plowing and grass waterway, Saline County* (1991), and *Rose Hill Cemetery* (1991), spell out the impact of human life and death on the spatial sweep of the plains.

Since 2004, Grossman has been tracking the course of the Kansas River by plane. Using video and still photographs, she constructs prairiescapes that are energized by the river's serpentine and runic unwinding. Although Grossman's river paintings may include an edge of sky, more so than in her previous works, her new works focus on the land. Unlike Evans's aerial photographs, however, Grossman's aerial paintings do not show the hand of humanity in the river's twisting. In her small watercolors, the river flows through a cerulean blue landscape; in her oils it moves like a golden snake through dark loam. In *86 Bends of the Kaw* (2004) (Fig. 12), Grossman mounts eighty-six prints of the river sequentially on six panels, with each print showing a different turning of the river along its 147-mile stretch. Print by print, and panel by panel, from pale rose through shades of amethyst to blue, she follows the river from dawn into dusk. She takes her viewers through an entire day, guiding them on an astonishing aesthetic journey through the Kansas land.

John C. Van Tramp in his 1860 *Prairie and Rocky Mountain Adventures* writes, "There is no describing the prairies. They are like the ocean in more than one particular but in none more than this: the utter impossibility of producing any just impression of them by description. They inspire feelings so unique, so distinct from anything else, so powerful, yet vague and indefinite, as to defy description, when they invite the attempt."⁴⁰ Artists of the sea and of the prairie continue to try to do the "utterly impossible": to describe the space, the light, the color, the texture, or the complex biology



FIG. 12. Lisa Grossman, *86 Bends of the Kaw*, 2004. Relief roll woodcut on silk tissue, mulberry paper, six wood panels, each 80 × 16 inches. Museum purchase made possible through Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund and an anonymous gift. Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas. Permission of the artist.

of these astonishing environments. They do so diversely, whether evoking wonder or nostalgia for the light of open spaces, whether using realistic or abstract modes of interpretation. They do so even as these environments are changing and receding before expanding populations, increased pollution, and aggressive exploitation of resources, reminding us to cherish both sea and prairie before we have only a screen-saver of a sea of grass to show us our loss.

NOTES

1. Diane Dufva Quantic, *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 157.
2. Robert Thacker, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 297.
3. Christine Martin, "Sea of Grass," sung by Ann Zimmerman, A-Z music (1998); Julie Dunlop, "Grasslands," *South Dakota Review* 41, no. 3 (Fall

2003): 20-21. Dunlop also asks that her readers "[l]ook at the prairie church out there like a ship sunning itself at sea."

4. Joni L. Kinsey, *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 22. Further citations to *Plain Pictures* are given in parentheses in the text.

5. Roger Stein, "Packaging the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 7.

6. As demonstrated by the collection of recent paintings in Don Lambert, ed., *Homage to the Flint Hills: A Gathering of Art Inspired by the Tallgrass Prairie of Kansas* (Topeka: Mainline Printing, 2004), there are numerous Kansas painters of the prairies. And as Kinsey's *Plain Pictures* indicates, numerous painters from other Great Plains states have also recently taken the prairies as their primary subject. Prairie photographers also abound, with such books as Peter Brown's *On the Plains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999) and Mark Feiden and Edward C. Robison's *The Kansas Landscape: Images from Home* (Wichita: Konza Press, 2005) contributing to the iconization of the prairie's representation as consisting of earth, horizon, and sky. The Leopold Gallery

in Kansas City and the Strecker-Nelson Gallery in Manhattan, Kansas, both specialize in works of prairie artists. The contemporary marine artists whom I've chosen to discuss come from several Atlantic coastal states. It is noteworthy that while contemporary European artists, such as conceptual artist Jan Dibbets from Holland and photographer Michael Collins from England, represent the sea in ways congruent with my discussion of contemporary American marine painting, I know of no recent, non-American artists committed to representing the prairies. It appears that American artists are indeed laying claim to representing these endangered interior spaces.

7. Sudlow, Grossman, and Copt all live in Lawrence, Kansas; Schwarm lives in Emporia, Kansas, while Jacobshagen lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Evans, after living for many years in Salina, Kansas, moved to Chicago. Copt, Jacobshagen, Schwarm, and Evans were born in Kansas and grew up in the state. Sudlow taught in the Art and Design Department at the University of Kansas, and Grossman, Copt, Jacobshagen, Schwarm, and Evans are all graduates of this department.

8. Major Steven Long is responsible for this term, which can be found in his "General Description of the Country Traversed by the Exploring Expedition between the Meridian of Council Bluffs and the Rocky Mountains," in *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819 and '20*, comp. Edwin James, vol. 14 of *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: A. H. Clark, 1904-7), 147. Joni Kinsey, Rebecca Roberts, and Robert Sayre discuss the changing historical and cultural responses to the Great Plains in the last two centuries, from their representation as a tabula rasa to their becoming a cherished, endangered landscape, in "Prairie Prospects: The Aesthetics of Plainness," *Prospects* 21 (1996): 261-97.

9. Roxanne Fridirici and Stephen E. White, "Kansas through the Eyes of Kansans," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 44-58. Basing their study on a sampling of Kansas State University students' response to diverse photographs of Kansas scenes, Fridirici and White note that although "Kansans sometimes seem almost apologetic about their state's dull 'image,' or lack of scenic vistas," they showed a high preference for "sky views, human impacts that appear to be in harmony with nature, and color contrast" (44, 47).

10. Several novels about both the sea and the prairies have recently received national attention through literary awards and extensive promotion, e.g., Andrea Barrett's *Voyage of the Narwhale* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (New York: Harcourt, 2001) about the sea, and

Kent Haruf's *Plainson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), which are set on the Great Plains.

11. See Roger Stein, *Seascape and the American Imagination* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art/Clarkson N. Potter, 1975). Further citations to *Seascape and the American Imagination* are given in parentheses in the text.

12. Examples include an unknown artist's *Meditation by the Sea* (1850-60), John F. Kensett's *Coast Scene with Figures* (1869), Winslow Homer's *Girl in Red Stockings* (Fisher Girl) (1882), and Robert Henri's *Girl Seated by the Sea* (1893).

13. Ryder, evoking such figures as Jonah, the Flying Dutchman, and Lord Ullin's daughter, swirled thick paint onto his small canvases to suggest the tumultuous nature of the sea. In his other seascapes—for example, *Moonlit Cove* (1880-90) and *Marine* (c. 1890)—which anticipate Robert Motherwell's abstractions, the sea seems to swallow the moon and the sun, clouds and waves becoming one. Vedder's sea paintings and drawings, such as *Memories* (1870), depend on the precise rendering of line and detail characteristic of Art Deco.

14. Homer, however, is probably best known for his dramatic sea paintings in which human beings are posed against the sea's patterns. They are shown responding in several emotional ways—exhilarated by the sea, as in *Sailing the Catboat* (1873) and *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)* (1876), or endangered by it, as in later works, *The Life Line* (1884), *The Fog Warning* (1885), and *The Gulf Stream* (1899). Such paintings as *Kissing the Moon* (1904) and *Right and Left* (1909), both done at the beginning of the twentieth century, continue to reflect emotional content while emphasizing the abstract qualities of the ocean's waves. See Jules David Prown, *American Painting: From Its Beginnings to the Armory Show* (New York: World Publishing Co., n.d.), 90-91.

15. Kinsey, *Plains Pictures*, 41-43, discusses nineteenth-century paintings of the burning prairie by Caitlin (*Prairie Meadows Burning*, 1832), Paul Kane (*Prairie on Fire*, ca. 1849), and Meyer Straus (*Herd of Buffalo Fleeing from a Prairie Fire*, 1888).

16. Quoted in Joan Carpenter Troccoli's "Illustrated Commentary," in *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, ed. George Gurney and Therese Thau Heyman (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2002), 153.

17. Quoted in *The Early Work of Laura Gilpin* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 1981), n.p.

18. Lambert, *Homage to the Flint Hills*, n.p.

19. Robert Sudlow, *Spiritual Journeys: The Art of Robert Sudlow* (Kansas City: Mid-America Arts Alliance, 2002), 34. Further citations to *Spiritual Journeys* are cited in parentheses in the text.

20. Lynn Bretz, introduction to *Landscapes in Kansas: Paintings by Robert Sudlow* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), n.p.
21. Quoted in "Upcoming Events and Exhibitions" in *The Arts in Action* (April 25-August 14, 2004).
22. Conversation with Lisa Grossman, April 28, 2004. Grossman frequently donates her paintings to be used by Kansas environmental groups for posters and cards. In addition, she is an active member of several of these groups in her local community.
23. Quoted in *Arts in Action*.
24. See also Tim Barringer and Andrew Wilton's *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
25. See Virginia Campbell, "Far and Wide: Keith Jacobshagen's Spare Midwestern Landscapes Have Skies That Stretch Forever," *Southwest Art*, April 2004, 88.
26. Quoted in Sam Hunter's *Expression and Meaning: The Marine Paintings of John Marin* (n.p.: Eaton Fine Art, Inc., 1998), 26.
27. Larry Schwarm, *On Fire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), n.p.
28. Quoted in Campbell, "Far and Wide," 88.
29. Klaus Kertess, "Oceanicity" in *Sea Change* (Southampton, NY: Parrish Art Museum, 1998) 16. Further citations to *Sea Change* are given in the text.
30. Rachel Sudlow, "Artist's Statement," http://www.lawrenceartscenter.com/Artists/Rachel_Sudlow/statement.html. Sudlow is also an accomplished creator of jewelry using natural imagery.
31. Schwarm, *On Fire*, n.p.
32. Louis Copt, "Conversations with Earth and Sky," brochure (Manhattan, KS: Strecker-Nelson Gallery), n.p.
33. Robert Adams, introduction to Schwarm, *On Fire*, n.p.
34. Quoted in Don Lambert's "Painting a Kansas Prairie Burn-off," *American Artist*, August 2003, 57.
35. Schwarm, *On Fire*, n.p.
36. Terry Evans, "Prairie Patterns," in *Prairie: Images of Ground and Sky* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 14. Further citations to "Prairie: Images of Ground and Sky" are given in parentheses in the text.
37. Although I have seen numerous cross-section photographs of sky, land, water surface, and ocean depths, these have appeared in nature journals and brochures from conservation groups. However, I know of no marine artists representing the sea in this fashion.
38. French photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand in the international bestseller *Earth from Above: 365 Days* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2001) and Bernard Edmaier in *Earthsong* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2002) have each brought together aerial photographs featuring the diverse and astonishing patterns on the planet's surface—its seas and lands, often imprinted by human designs. Given the range of their aerial cameras, however, neither Arthus-Bertrand nor Edmaier could be categorized strictly as a marine artist.
39. Evans's interest in revealing the human impact on the prairie through aerial photography is evident in her book *The Inhabited Prairie* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998). This interest is also the basis for the acclaimed exhibition of Evans's recent aerial photography of Chicago, "Revealing Chicago: An Aerial Portrait," held in Chicago's Millennium Park in 2005.
40. Quoted in William Least-Heat-Moon's *Prairie-Earth* (a deep map) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991), 21.