



Connecting People with Nature  
through Science and the Arts

## Land & Sky: Artwork of Gary & Gretchen Gackstatter

Artist: Gary & Gretchen Gackstatter

Art Exhibit: June 05-28, 2012



**Artist Statement:** Come walk with us. There is beauty in the sublime. There is a sense of longing in all of us for timelessness and a connection to the earth. The Flint Hills have always been beyond the capabilities of our language to express the depth of inspiration that comes from taking even one step on the prairie. In that one step, as you place one foot in front of the other, you have travelled thousands of years and experienced flood and famine, snows and suns, man and beast, stone and sky. On the Tallgrass Prairie, you can feel the arch of the earth as you walk.

**Artist Biography:** Artists Gretchen and Gary Gackstatter have roots in this land that inform the very existence of their work. It rises up through them and comes out onto canvas and paper in ways that capture the essence of this slowness and timelessness. Although the paths they take could not be more opposed in approach, they arrive at the same place. A place deep in the Prairie Earth.

Watercolor has long been Gretchen's forte, although she is also gifted in other mediums. A paintbrush in her hand becomes an instrument of color improvisations. Wild and free in her expressions, her innate sense of balance, line, form and color theory display an energy and fire that takes the viewer on a ride that can be equal parts abstraction and realism. A sense of playfulness and joy and a child-like sense of wonder abound in her works as she takes in the very atmosphere of her surroundings and translates it so we can also see with her eyes and her boundless imagination.

Using 100-year-old crow quill pen tips and ink, Gary has taken the ancient art of ink drawing to a level not seen before. The depth within each piece of Gary's work requires the viewer to be a participant in his journey. Slowing down, taking one step at a time with him, as he describes the intricacies of the place. He allows us to come into contact with, and be aware of the sacredness of the seemingly insignificant: the lone tree, stones carved with age, the wind and rain and sun on the open plains. His slow and mindful attention to detail becomes almost abstract as one looks more closely then realizes the fullness of the pen and ink coming into focus. The image being crafted from thousands of lines and variances in value, almost shimmering with the beauty and depth he is able to bring to life through the simplicity of ink and paper. Each subject becomes an intimate, profound portrait done out of profound love and respect. With each microscopic layer of ink, he also layers meaning. He gives voice to the inanimate and lets them speak.

What joins these two artists together is a deep love of the natural world. Long inspired by Chase County and the Flint Hills, Gretchen and Gary's roots in the Kansas landscape are deep. They both see and express the sublime in the stone and skies.

Gretchen Gackstatter has BFA from University of Colorado and Kansas State University, and has taught art in the public schools in Colorado and Texas. She now teaches in her own studio and exhibits in and around St. Louis.

Gary Gackstatter has degrees in music and conducting from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and Wichita State, and is a two-time recipient of the Kansas Governor's Arts Award — once as conductor of the Winfield Regional Symphony and as an Individual Multi-genre Artist. He is also a composer with his works for orchestra and band performed internationally. Gackstatter has composed five symphonies, each one combining music with various other art forms, and currently teaches and conducts at St Louis Community College, Meramec. In 2010, Gackstatter was involved in the filming of 'Return to PrairyErth', a film by John O'Hara documenting the impact of the 1985 book 'PrairyErth' by William Least-Heat Moon.

The Green Center is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to *Connect People with Nature Through Science and The Arts.*