

Kingman's Nebraska

Snippets from the Archives

A celebrated artist's tribute to the Great Prairie-Plains of mid 20th Century Nebraska



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A Personal View
By Elizabeth A. Kingman
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Eugene Kingman (1909 – 1975) loved the great Prairie-Plains of the Mid West, and he delighted in painting scenes that captured the distinct flavor that is Nebraska.

This work in progress is an initial, informal compilation of images, writings and personal observations from the family archives, and offers some insights about this great artist and human being whom I am proud to call my father.

This perspective "KINGMAN'S NEBRASKA: Snippets from the Archives" will be expanded and refined as additional information is uncovered.

More information is on our website:

www.eugenekingman.com

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Summer Storm

1952 – Oil on Canvas
16x20" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Owned by Mrs. Albert Lange Turner, Omaha, Nebraska



INTRODUCTION

Before he put down roots in Omaha, Eugene Kingman (1909-1975) was already an established artist, painter of National Parks, New Deal muralist, art teacher, lithographer and landscape painter, as well as a rising innovator and talent in the museum world. And on that note, one can't talk about Eugene Kingman without also mentioning his connection to Joslyn Art Museum and the deep impact he had on this noble institution over his twenty-three year stewardship as Director.



Corn Country

1961 – Oil on panel
16x20" Frame

Field near Omaha

Chosen by jury for representation in Omaha Bell Telephone Co.
1970 calendar under month of November
Exhibited at Audubon Artists' 19th Annual Exhibition in 1961 in New York.
Also exhibited in 1973 Joslyn exhibit in Omaha.

A native New Englander, he was no stranger to the lands west of the Mississippi River. His love affair with the Great Plains and the West began as a teenager and continued throughout his life. In the late 1920s, while a student at Yale, his father and his uncle loaded up their families and traveled west (mainly by car) on an odyssey to visit 10 national parks. It was the first time Gene was exposed to the magnificent great plains, the majestic mountains of the rockies and the spectacular settings of the west. It was life changing for this young artist. He embraced EVERYTHING about the great plains, the west, the southwest (including Mexico), the northwest... and he had a burning need to paint scenes of this majestic land. From that time forward he traveled west as often as he could and folks began to notice his talent. In 1931, the National Park Service exhibited seven of his paintings at an international art show in Paris, France. He was only 21 at the time.

Edge of the Missouri

1951 – Oil on Canvas
24x28" Frame
Also called "Missouri River Near Tekamah, Nebraska"

Missouri River looking north of Blair, Nebraska near Tekamah

Commissioned by Mrs. Jasper Hall of Omaha



In 1934 he joined up with his nationally known geologist uncle, Wallace W. Atwood Jr., who was a member of the scientific staff of the National Park Service. They were assigned to unravel the geologic story of Crater Lake and the Yosemite Valley. During the expedition, they accumulated a wealth of geologic evidence. As a result, dad created 13 paintings that reconstructed the evolution of this epic in earth's history. These paintings illustrated Dr. Atwood's article that was published in the March, 1937 issue of ***National Geographic Magazine.*** The full article is on the Kingman website (see page 2).

Beyond the information and images, the journey's greater importance, in my dad's view, was to demonstrate how the artist and the scientist can parlay their talents and work together successfully in providing a useful perspective and vision. As my dad put it:

"Our idea was to take one scene… go back thousands of years in research. The paintings illustrated the change… an impressionistic history. Wally wrote the story… I painted the pictures as we visualized them for each period."



Study of Missouri

1953 – Oil on Canvas
24x36" Frame

Commissioned by Mr. Dan W. Campbell

This interdisciplinary approach and view of the world was a central theme in his life and in all his pursuits. At an early age he developed an intense interest in interpretive science and its relationship to the arts. I attribute this to the fact that he grew up in a creative and scholarly family who encouraged him to pursue his own course. As the archives indicate, he was curious about everything having to do with art and science. At one point he even considered studying medicine, and with his siblings was also an accomplished musician. But the paint brush had a stronger draw. Painting was in his bones, a passion that emerged ***"... as early as I can remember"*** he once said.

Elkhorn River Farm Yard

1952 – Oil on Canvas
18x24" Frame

Owned by Mrs. Al Turner of Omaha



Purely American Art

NEW DEAL ARTIST

Gene was a serious muralist, and as such always painted interpretively. While an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design, and as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal Programs, he was awarded three commissions by the Fine Arts Section of the U.S. Treasury Department to create murals in the post-offices in Hyattsville, Maryland; Kemmerer, Wyoming; and East Providence, Rhode Island. These murals are still in place at this writing.

In 1937, while visiting Mesa Verde National Park, he met his soul-mate, Betty Yelm, a western gal, an anthropologist, Park Ranger and museum assistant – one of the first women in the National Park Service during the 1930s. (I always referred to her as a "rubble rouser whose career was in ruins"). They married in 1939, just days before he became the first Director of the Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I don't know if they ever got an official honeymoon, but from the beginning they worked as a team, both personally and professionally. Her unofficial title was "Co-Director." Given an empty building with three pieces of art in its collection, he had a chance to experiment with some of his revolutionary ideas in museum development and interpretive exhibit design. In three short years the museum became a popular art and cultural center for the community. He might have stayed but then the Army called him to service in 1942, requiring them to move to Washington, D.C.



Ready for the Harvest

1952 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Owned by Ralph Mayer for the Cornhusker Motor Club in Omaha

THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

While he was Chief of the Map Division at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), two amazing opportunities arose in 1945, pending his discharge from the Army. He was commissioned by the publisher of ***The New York Times*** to create an iconic mural for their lobby (just off Times Square), where it hung for nearly four decades.

The other opportunity arose when Gene had occasion to meet with Dr. Paul H. Grumman, Director of the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. Dr. Grumman had been the museum's only director, and after many years had expressed a desire to retire. He was so excited by Gene's original ideas for museum development and how such an institution could be an effective, positive force in the community. Subsequently he hand-picked my dad to assume the directorship of Joslyn after a year of orientation.

When offered the opportunity to come to Omaha, he jumped at the chance, as long as he could honor his commitment to ***The New York Times***. The museum readily agreed, so in February, 1946 with wife, Betty, and three-year-old daughter, Mixie, in tow, he pulled up stakes in Washinton, D.C. and put down roots in Omaha to raise his family. What a blessing this turned out to be for the whole Kingman family!

The Fog Hangs Low

1957 – Oil on Canvas
18x40" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Owned by Nes Latenser of Omaha



KINGMAN'S NEBRASKA

Snippets From The Archives



Across Nebraska

1957 – Oil on Canvas?
30x48" Frame

Fields west of Omaha

Owned by Mr. & Mrs. Dr. & Mrs. Dewey Bisgard

During the first few years in Omaha, Gene immersed himself in the history, the culture, the scenery, and most importantly, the people of Nebraska, while he focused on Joslyn and increasing its presence in the community. He also became a specialist in painting Nebraska cornfields, and he constantly explored the media of egg tempera, oil and acrylic. According to him, working with different media gave him a change of pace and renewed his energies. Word started to get around about this talented artist. In between his museum duties he quietly worked on ***The New York Times*** mural in Joslyn's basement, completing the majority of it before installing it in New York City in 1948, the same year I appeared on the scene.

In spite of his busy schedule, he always continued to paint or at least sketch ideas. It was an integral part of our family life. I remember as a kid, all of us piling into the station wagon and driving to the outskirts of Omaha, finding a great place for a picnic. He'd paint, MaMa would read; the two of them would converse and enjoy each other's company, while Mixie and I would explore the countryside, usually a nearby cornfield or barn. But as we grew, and as the demands of the museum took more of his time, leisurely weekend family picnics became less frequent. Instead, he would adjust his schedule to rushing out in late afternoon when the light was good, making sketches then working up larger, more formal compositions in his studio later. In fact the studio, just off the living room, was a focal point of the house, and he wired it up with an elaborate music system so he could "paint to Beethoven" as MaMa would often describe it. Classical music was frequently played, even when he wasn't painting, giving home life a peaceful yet stimulating atmosphere for creative pursuits.

Nebraska Corn Harvest

1952 – Oil on Canvas
18x24" Frame
Scene near Omaha

Published in Omaha World Herald Magazine Section, 22 June 1953
Purchased by Mrs. Leroy Crosby in 1976



Depending on the time of day, the sketching either captured what he wanted or it didn't. He cited as an example a tractor he stumbled upon which was perfect to add to the corner of a painting, but the light failed before it could take shape on his canvas. Regardless, he always noted that it was ***"important to be in the environs – to experience the setting directly."*** One of his favorite places was near the intersection of Blondo Street and Ten-Mile Road.

"I've often driven out on the edge of Omaha in late afternoon and started to paint because it's all about those characteristic elements up close and at a distance that say this is Nebraska."

Eugene Kingman in an interview with Ted Landale for ***"Omaha World-Herald Magazine,"*** June 21, 1953, by Ted Landale

At another time, in late afternoon, he pulled up to paint a scene with a tractor in the foreground and a farmhouse in the middle distance, and a farmer drove up behind him. "Oh," said the farmer, "you're just a painter. I thought you were up here to strip my tractor of sparkplugs."



Along the Platte

1955 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame

Platte Valley near Omaha

Exhibited at Audubon Artists show in New York in January 1956, and the Association of Omaha Arts show in Septemer, 1956.

Purchased by Mr. & Mrs. Dale Clark of Omaha

Eugene Kingman The Person

Even with his New England roots – accent and all – the locals, particularly professional artists and musicians in Omaha, quickly discovered he was not at all like the typical, polite but condescending eastern afficiandos who would descend on Omaha as though they were the Messiahs from Mecca come to enlighten these mid-western heathens and farmers about art. In fact they found he was just the opposite. He was easy to talk to, had a terrific but quiet sense of humor, embraced the art community around him, welcomed their ideas and incorporated them into Joslyn in a variety of ways.

As an art museum director he was interested in art in all its manifestations, and especially its history. He enjoyed viewing the work of other artists, both ancient and modern, and gave careful attention to the presentation of their work in the museum. His interest in the design of exhibits grew from the combination of museum expertise and his own artistic training and skill.

Here's how one local reporter described him: Excerpts from an article in the ***"Dundee Sun,"*** March 11, 1965 by Rosemary Madison

"Gene Kingman might be called unique in art circles for one quality alone: he has never patronized anybody. He is incapable of it. He just doesn't think that way."

"...Gene Kingman is not the stereotyped 'reserved New Englander.' He is neither serene nor shrewd. His native outgoing good will places a trust in altruistic motives, and he lacks skepticism or cynicism in any form."

Corn Belt Country

1951 – Oil on Canvas
20x28" Frame

Scene at John Merriam's former home in Omaha, Nebraska

Commissioned by Mr. & Mrs. John Merriam, also known as "Lucy's View"



"... It is impossible to divorce the character, atmosphere and tradition of New England from Gene Kingman. Though he may savor and enjoy the flamboyant color of a Texas oil town, the bona fide New Englander remains unimpressed by the more obvious appurtenances of the parvenu. Oil makes money and money buys a treeless house with a two-Cadillac garage. So what's that?..."

"How far back do his American roots go? All the way. Press him. 'Oh, the Pilgrims, the Mayflower and all that – but I don't make a point of it.' Natural democrats, who are always able to strip people of their superficialities and look on men as men, will always be attracted to and like Gene Kingman. He is one of them."

"His tact is innate, and he has an uncommon sensitivity for people of all types, often resulting in small courtesies beyond the call of duty. Though the tread is velvet, he's still capable of the forthright thrust when needed."

"The green light on any new venture in the arts with meaning for Omaha has long been Eugene Kingman's trademark... Already, Eugene Kingman has left his strong stamp on the city. Succeeding generations of Nebraskans will be in his debt."

"Dundee Sun," March 11, 1965 by Rosemary Madison



Offutt Farm, Elk City, Nebraska

1954 – Oil on Canvas
18x24" Frame

Scene near Bennington, Nebraska

Owned by Mr. & Mrs. John L. Offutt of Omaha, Nebraska

His Eastern contemporaries and others in the museum and art worlds found it curious that a New Englander would want to put down roots in Omaha, Nebraska of all places. And he was often amused at their attitude toward the Midwest.

"My colleagues in the museum world just don't get it – why I'm out here, why anybody would be out here. I've had it time and again... So where are you now, Gene?" someone asked during an exhibit opening. His reply, ***"In Omaha."***

August Evening, Nebraska

1951 – Oil on Canvas
18x24" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Owned by Mr. & Mrs. Philip Dodge, Jr.



"Omaha? Oh, Good God!"

"I like it because there is opportunity here, freedom of action and independent ideas – the attitude, the outlook, are open to new ideas. It's fresh, free, open, informal."

At conferences of museum directors, he became quite accustomed to the inevitable remarks about Indians. His typical response was ***"Oh, yes. Every morning the Indians come in for encampment and treaty – and we let them use the museum grounds."*** (one of several variations)

Not only did he take great joy in painting simple yet alluring scenes as he saw them, he also appreciated the rich history of the Plains and the deep impact it had on the arts. He felt strongly this combination of history, art, scientific and technological advances – all influenced by the environment – shaped the region and its character that is unique to the Midwest. And it was important to bring to light this rich legacy to the people of Nebraska. As such, he featured Nebraska's heritage both through Joslyn exhibitions, community programs, lectures and writings. And, oh, did I mention his paintings?



October Afternoon

1952 – Oil on Canvas?
24x40" Frame

Owned by Dr. Ernest Fielding of Sioux City, Iowa

In 1953 Joslyn hosted a one-man show of dad's works. It took several attempts to persuade him to do this because self-promotion was a completely foreign concept to him. After repeated pleas on the part of both the Associated Artists of Omaha and the Women's Committee of the Society of Liberal Arts, he finally agreed. And, as expected, the show was very well received.

Nebraska Harvest

1952 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Privately owned



Artist's Statement for the Show

These paintings represent, for the most part, my impressions of eastern Nebraska. Some of them are sketches done on the spot to catch a quick light effect or color note; others are more complete paintings worked up from sketches. All of them are based on some characteristic of our part of the country – a segment of terrain that is constantly changing in time of day, in season of year, and, most predominantly, by the hand of man.

This country has a distinctive character that I want to portray. Time for painting is limited, so my working radius is within a few miles of Omaha; but here at hand is a wealth of material that is expansive, yet intimate and human in all its parts. A few canvases from trips through out-state Nebraska and a New Hampshire vacation are also included.

There must be a clear-cut purpose, a motivating force in any painting to make it successful, regardless of subject or individual style. To me this force is found in our Nebraska landscape, and whether or not it is completely expressed, it is the underlying substance in the paintings.

– Eugene Kingman



Harvest Monument

1953 – Oil on Casein
24x40" Frame

Of course, through my eyes, Eugene Kingman was a great artist with the talent and creativity of a Da Vinci, a Thomas Hart Benton (his friend), a Diego Rivera... I could name others. One would expect such praise from a daughter (but the word "boring" comes to mind). Instead it seems more fitting to share what other folks had to say:

"...Perhaps Mr. Kingman the painter was persuaded to come out of hiding because 'representational painting shows signs of coming back into style. And there are 'no abstractions' or monstrosities in the Kingman one-man show. Three-quarters of the exhibit consists of painting and sketches Mr. Kingman made by jumping in his car, driving out in the country and putting Nebraska landscape on canvas. Half of the paintings are of identifiable places in Douglas County. Nearly all were made in the past two years, most of them in 1952.

"Artist after artist who has viewed the Kingman show… has declared that Mr. Kingman has indeed captured the spirit of Nebraska's rolling terrain largely populated by cornstalks. Better, indeed, than virtually any native son or daughter."

"The most acute comment at the opening came from the lips of Augustus Dunbier, no mean Nebraska landscapist himself, who said: 'The people are facing the walls. They don't have their backs to the walls while they make talk.' "

"That's tribute."

– ***"Omaha World-Herald Magazine,"*** June 21, 1953, by Ted Landale

Melting Snows No. 1

1949 – Oil on canvas
20x28.5" Frame

West of Omaha, Spier Farm
Mellting Snows No. 2 is similar... completed in 1950
See Providence Journal, 25 January 1953

Exhibited May, 1951 at Associated Artists of Omaha show, and at Providence Art Club, Providence, R.I. in January, 1953.

Owned by private collector who gave it to Joslyn in 1984.



"Despite his heritage and background, Kingman seems to have moved completely under the sway of the wide, rolling prairie country on the Nebraska farmlands, allowing the land and the turn of the seasons to inspire his art, and producing large, handsome paintings which go a long way to revive the validity of the once-preeminent Midwest school of American painting."

"…pictures which can give us a sense of the majesty and power of our land… Kingman often succeeds in doing these canvases… these pictures convey a simple elemental quality, the broad panorama of the land itself, and do it in a manner which should bring esthetic satisfaction to the beholder."

"Kingman isn't always lyrical about his farmland. Sometimes he depicts them in a raw and elemental mood – as in the weirdly lighted but strongly patterned 'Melting Snows, No. 2," a picture of real merit both in its larger conception and in the painting of its details."

"The Providence Sunday Journal" January 25, 1952, by Bradford F. Swan
Paintings exhibited at Providence Art Club



Wet Day

1952 – Oil on Canvas
16x20" Frame

Near the road between Lincoln and Omaha

"The artist has an interest in the American scene, but not in the merely picturesque. He carefully eschews the latter… In the big sweeping views, the long looks across rolling country, the artist does capture the majestic power of the fertile land, the great mass of the towering grain elevator, the endless ribbon of the long highway."

"The Providence Sunday Journal" January 25, 1952, by Bradford F. Swan
Paintings exhibited at Providence Art Club

Nebraska

May 1960 – Composite of scenes in Nebraska
30 x 48"

Commissioned by the Board of the Omaha Country Club for their lobby. Years later given to the Joslyn. Exhibited at special auction and sold for $3,000.00 to the head of Valmont Industries at Valley, Nebraska. Proceeds benefited the Women's Assn. Fund for the Museum.



In 1960, the Omaha Country Club commissioned Gene to create a large landscape for their lobby, and he was asked to do a New England scene. "Why New England?" he asked. "Why not Nebraska?" Oh, heaven forbid that anything but a New England scene be considered for the Country Club's décor! It was sacrosanct! This just was not done! The answer was a polite but firm "no."

"How about New England with a little bit of Nebraska?" After some thought, the answer was a reluctant "yes but we reserve judgment." In the final analysis Gene painted what he had wanted to all along – a Nebraska scene with a little bit of New England. And of course they loved it and displayed it for many years.

"I'll paint a picture along the lines suggested – but by golly, they don't have to take it. I'll paint to my satisfaction, but if they don't like it, I'll make another start later on."



Outward Bound

1957 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame

Road and gate near Omaha

Purchased by Northern Natural Gas Co. for its collection in 1959

As mentoned earlier, beyond his dedication and service to Joslyn, Gene absolutely loved the great plains of the Midwest, its rich pioneering history and the profound influence art has had on this part of the country. He felt strongly that this rich history be integrated into Joslyn exhibits and programs. Also, he would often write and lecture on the subject.

IN HIS OWN WORDS 



Missouri River Above Tekamah
1953 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame
Scene as titled

Commissioned by Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Campbell of Omaha, who had a summer place near the scene.

The Artistic Heritage of Mid-Western America

by Eugene Kingman

When we consider the art forms as the heritage of a region we can think right away in terms of time and place and can recognize appropriateness and the quality of workmanship and material in the design and function of the object.

Applying these criteria to pioneer art of the Midwest, the prairie way of life influenced all aspects of life. The horse became a necessity for speedy travel which promptly brought about a whole new fashion of attire – the flexible six-shooter replaced the rifle for quick action especially on horseback… the development of barbed wire became imperative because wood for fencing was unobtainable.

The Indian culture was rich in art forms based on mobility – the teepee and the travois, painted hunting scenes on buffalo skins, embroidery on leather and cloth… the Plains culture reached its climax in the mid-Nineteenth Century when it encountered the encroachments of white settlement and from this point on the arts to both peoples are intermixed and have had a deep influence on each other, even to the present day.

The West was explored in paint by artist-reporters in the Nineteenth Century and it wasn't until the 1920s and 1930s that the Midwest and Plains area was again such a popular subject for American artists. In those decades, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry and Thomas Benton, each in his own way, opposed the European influx of ideas and turned away to native states of Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri to find, for them, greater significance in the home theme.

It takes little imagination to construct this graphic record of the various standards of living achieved on the Plains, and, until recently, the close control laid down by the physical environment. Add to this the deep-rooted spirit of the Nineteenth Century Romanticism from the East – that colorful Victorian era in which the Midwest grew up – and we can really view our heritage in the proper perspective.

Kingman's observations in a paper delivered at the Coe College Midwest Heritage Conference (April, 1956)



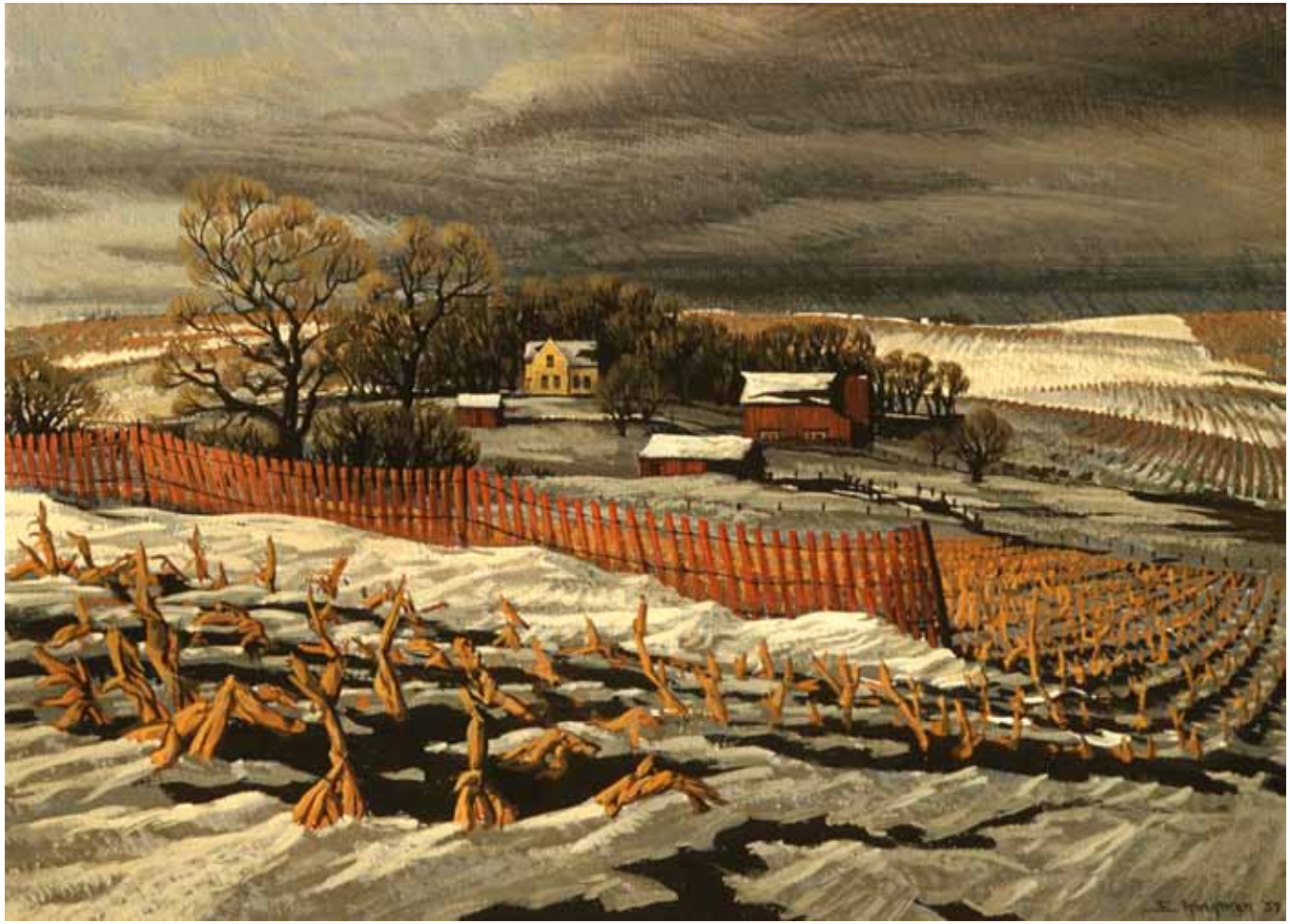
Winter in Nebraska

1969 – Acrylic
24x36" Frame

Farm near Omaha

Owned by Senator Roman Hruska and displayed in his home.

AMERICAN HERITAGE Magazine published the following article my Dad authored in December, 1954. By its very title it is fitting to include it in this perspective.



Winter's End

1957 – Oil on Canvas
22x28" Frame

Scene near Omaha

Winner of the Providence Art CLub Prize, 1957

Purchased by Mr. & Mrs. Edward S. Spicer of Providence, R.I.

Painters of the Plains

The Middle West has put its stamp on many artists' work

By Eugene Kingman

It is a big country, sprawling all the way from the Alleghenies to the Rockies, and it puts its mark on the people who live in it. Its climate tends to be uncompromising – baking heat in the summer, hostile cold in the winter – and it has never done anything by halves. Where it had forests, they rolled for hundreds of miles, great stands of hardwood, green twilight under their branches; its open prairies were like the sea itself, rolling west in an unbroken treeless groundswell.

When white men came to break this wilderness for settlement it smote them with Indian warriors, plagued them with malaria, put its enormous rivers in periodic destructive floods; then, as they persevered, it enriched them beyond their hopes, with wealth from its forests and its minerals and its fertile soil.

So the American Middle West has from the beginning been a strong rich area, a land of wonder and terror that has come to seem commonplace only because so many men have lived there so long. And from the beginning it has been a challenge to the artist, putting its own stamp on his attempt to record the look and the sweep and the feel of it.



The Doorly House

1960 – Oil on Canvas
22x30" Frame

The Henry Doorly residence near the University of Omaha

Commissioned by Dale and Kay Clark for gift to Henry Doorly

First, the Indian: a man who had intelligently adapted himself to his physical world, making a balanced use of all of its gifts. The Indian never had any particular wish to conquer nature; he wanted simply to exist in it. He understood how to work out a natural interplay between himself and the forces of his physical environment, and as a result he created a well-integrated culture.

The Indian ways of self expression – both his artistic achievements and his religious practices – were completely tied in with his everyday life and with his wish to make himself comfortable and in harmony with his physical surroundings. He wanted to express himself well in all things: in making and decorating of his dwelling, his clothing, his food, his vessels and his weapons, and most especially in the articles which he made for ceremonial use.

So he produced a highly decorative art which was symbolic, mystic and religious – for it was closely connected with prayer. The deeply significant symbols and painted and quilted designs of the early Plains Indians, for instance, were made with vast care. They were not only expressions of the artistic impulse; if properly done they were talismans that would produce abundant buffalo herds.

Corn Harvest

1956 – Oil on Canvas
18x24" Frame

Corn crib with farm in background near Omaha

Owned by Jake Imig of Omaha



The first white artists who undertook to depict the Middle West came with the exploring parties and government expeditions in the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century. Unlike the native artists, these men recorded just what they saw, as they saw it; for their job was to make authentic reports on the infinitely varied aspects of this great new country. The men who had sent them out wanted to know what the land looked like, how its plants grew and its animals behaved, how its rivers ran and where its mountains rolled.

For the East wanted to know all it could learn about the great West. Artists who did not sign onto expeditions free-lanced on their own, going as far west as they could, often joining with traders and trappers. Many of these artists came from Europe, with a background of strict academic training in England, Germany, Austria or France. They painted in the warmth of Nineteenth Century romanticism, but their job was primarily that of reporters.

Yet they were basically artists after all; and some of them added that strength of individuality and character that is the substance of art, producing work that has found a rich place in the story of Nineteenth Century painting.



Burlington Track

1966 – Oil
20x36" Frame

Burlington Railroad track
west of North Platte, Nebraska

Commissioned by Burlington Railroad Executive, Mrs. Ellsworth Moser, as a memorial to her husband who was a director ofthe Burlington Railroad. The painting was installed in the Executive Car used by the Directors of the Railroad.

So while Karl Bodmer, for instance, was recording life along the wide Missouri in 1833, many of his pictures carried a quality that lifted them above strict illustration – and Bodmer, the artist, emerges. His work is factual, but it has a sympathetic feel of the country. Bodmer was responding to the influences of his environment.

Others did the same, finding a strong response to their creative compulsions. Examples are numerous: Alfred Jacob Miller, in his paintings of Rocky Mountain scenery and Indians of the Plains; John Mix Stanley, in his landscapes and studies of Indian life on the early railroad surveys; George Catlin, the true artistic value of whose great record of the Western Indian has only recently been fully recognized; and Captain Seth Eastman, in valuable records made during his early service on the Upper Mississippi.

Then the situation changed. In the later 1800's much of the Middle West was fully peopled. Yet the farther frontier country still beckoned – its gold, its cattle, its pioneering railway lines, its Indian wars, and its wild romantic vastness – and a glamour attached itself to it all and beckoned to the painters and recorders. Eastern magazines such as *Harper's* and *Leslie's* sent their illustrators west, and their illustrations bear the mark of men who felt that they were called on to report a strange and exciting country. As historical records, these pictures are rich and abundant, although as works of art they often leave much to be desired.

Autumn Morning, Memorial Park

1964 – Oil on Canvas
24x36" Frame

Memorial Park on West Dodge St. in Omaha

Commissioned by Willis A. Strauss, President and Chairman of the Board of Northern Natural Gas Co. in Omaha



Still, exceptional work does now and then appear – product of the times and the environment, like all the rest, but nevertheless expressing deeply the impact of the environment upon the artist. Ranney, Tait, Russell, Remington and Schreyvogel caught the spirit as well as the factual detail of what they painted. Late in the Century the romance of the cowboy-cattle theme captivated the imagination, and new artists appeared, including Frank Tenney Johnson and William R. Leigh.

Meanwhile, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, another group of painters moved west, drawn not by the cowboys and Indians and hell-roaring mine camp characters but by the sheer dramatic quality of the Western landscape. These painters – Bierstadt, Moran, Hill, Keith and others – were stirred by the vastness, depth, height and remoteness of the Western scene. They caught its changing moods in the same tradition that led other romantic landscape painters – Cole, Inness, Wyeth and Durand – to interpret the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains a few years earlier.

The effect of this growing romanticism on Western paintings appeared in the representation of subjects. Discarding the original factual approach, some painters – notably George de Forest Brush – represented the Indian, not as he really was but according to a predetermined conception. The Indian became the romantic child of nature, idealized to fit a poetic or romantic pattern. Accurate representations of costumes, habits and everyday life became relatively unimportant. The philosophical aspects came first.



Corn in Nebraska

1965 – Oil on Canvas
24x34" Frame

Fall scene in fields near Omaha

Commissioned by Officers' Wives Club for presentation to General and Mrs. Curtis LeMay, Commanding General of the Strategic Air Command, near Omaha upon his retirement.
Reported in January 26, 1965 Omaha World Herald

Again the situation changed: the Middle West has never been static. After the First World War the landscape and genre aspects of America had little interest for the younger artists. Many of them turned toward Paris and the Continent for study and inspiration. American artistic thought took on an international tinge, and the local scene became secondary. This was especially true in the Middle West – until that widely publicized triumvirate, Curry, Wood and Benton, struck out for the true roots of American life.

They found what they were looking for right at home – in the Main Streets, on the farms, in harvest scenes, at church suppers, and so on, in their native states of Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri. Other artists followed their lead. In the Thirties and early Forties, American Regionalism flourished. The homely, familiar American farm came into its own on canvas.

But these Regionalists were not making reports for surveys or providing illustrations for Eastern magazines, nor were they looking for romance in a by-gone or wholly imaginary era. Like the Nineteenth Century artists, they were realists; but their realism had a strong personal approach. The subject was only their starting point. Color, action and background were composed into a unified personal statement of the scene that was bold and direct, often freely and impressionistically painted – the same Western environment that influenced Bodmer, Stanley, Moran and Russell, subject now to a new age and thought.

Harvest Time

1969 – Acrylic on Canvas
24x36" Frame

Rolling Country near Omaha

Purchased by Arden Swisher of Omaha



The Regionalist movement, of course, did not affect all artists. Counter-movements of expressionism and non-objectivity had become well rooted in America during the 1920's. At mid-century, American artists have turned away from Regionalism. The physical environment has become secondary – even non-existent – to a world of inner ideas and personal emotions that is uppermost in modern painting.

Today the influence of environment in the middle part of this country lies not in its appearance but in its vastness, openness, and even – in an age of speedy air travel – in its distance from the east and west coasts. All over this area there are active centers where independent, creative work is going forward. In these separate areas it is possible that freshness, individuality and resourcefulness can be maintained in a period when art is becoming typed and design is becoming highly standardized.

For in the final analysis, the impact of the environment on the artist is largely mental. Increasingly, man ceases to be confined by his physical surroundings. The tremendous Middle West is still greater than the men who live in it and try to interpret it, but it challenges them now in a different way.



Davis Farm Scene, Autumn

1965 - Acrylic on Canvas
24x40" Frame

Herbert Davis Farm west of Omaha

Commissioned by the University of Omaha Faculty & Staff Committee, for presentation to Dr. Milo Bail, retiring President of the University.
Reported in Omaha World Herald, January 18, 1965. Donated to Joslyn in May, 1984

Currently on display in the Nebraska Governor's Mansion.

YOU CAN'T CORRAL A RENNAISSANCE MAN

While others generally categorized him as a REGIONAL and REPRESENTATIONAL artist, Dad took issue with such labels. I can remember him telling me once... ***"It doesn't matter what you call it. I just painted what I liked.... scenes I found interesting. Tom Benton and I used to chuckle over this seeming obsession in the art world to over-categorize everyone and everything. I understand the reasoning; I just think it can go to extremes."***

"While my work is representational, I feel that any painting to be successful must have some basic motivating idea to make it speak."

"Representation alone is only a means and can never be an end in itself. Too many people tend to judge a picture on this factor alone, instead of searching for something more meaningful that the artist was attempting to convey."

"Representation alone can be void without the imaginative, creative interpretation of the artist."

"But Mr. Kingman's cornfields look like cornfields," according to the *Omaha World-Herald Magazine* (June 21, 1953). "He interprets the seasons, the time of day, and never does he do something of which it cannot be said: "That I have seen…"

Edge of the Plains

1970 – Acrylic on Canvas
24x36" Frame

Looking at the Plains east of Denver
Also called "West of Big Springs"

Commissioned by U.S. National Bank in Omaha



CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

In the art and museum worlds during the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s, a general lay-person's impression of what was considered "respected" art was that it was done by European trained painters, the only art that was "art" hung in art museums, and what was flippantly labeled "American Art" was not really considered quality art in some of the Eastern dominated art circles.

There have always been a great many on-going debates about what is/was considered art, and there are/were movements that championed the unique spirit that is American Art – a philosophy that did not adhere to the notion that the only respectable art had to be rooted in the European influence and subject matter.

Dad was among those who celebrated the arts in ALL its manifestations, but especially the American artist, even though he himself had received European training in the course of his life experience. But he thought differently from most other folks. In an age of specialization and tunnel vision, he was truly a renaissance man who viewed the world through an interdisciplinary lens, particularly in his approach to museum interpretation and his deep understanding of history. He was truly ahead of his time, and I am grateful he passed this perspective onto me – to value a liberal arts education and to always revere a "generalist" point of view.



Blowing Corn

1958 – Oil on Canvas
20x24" Frame

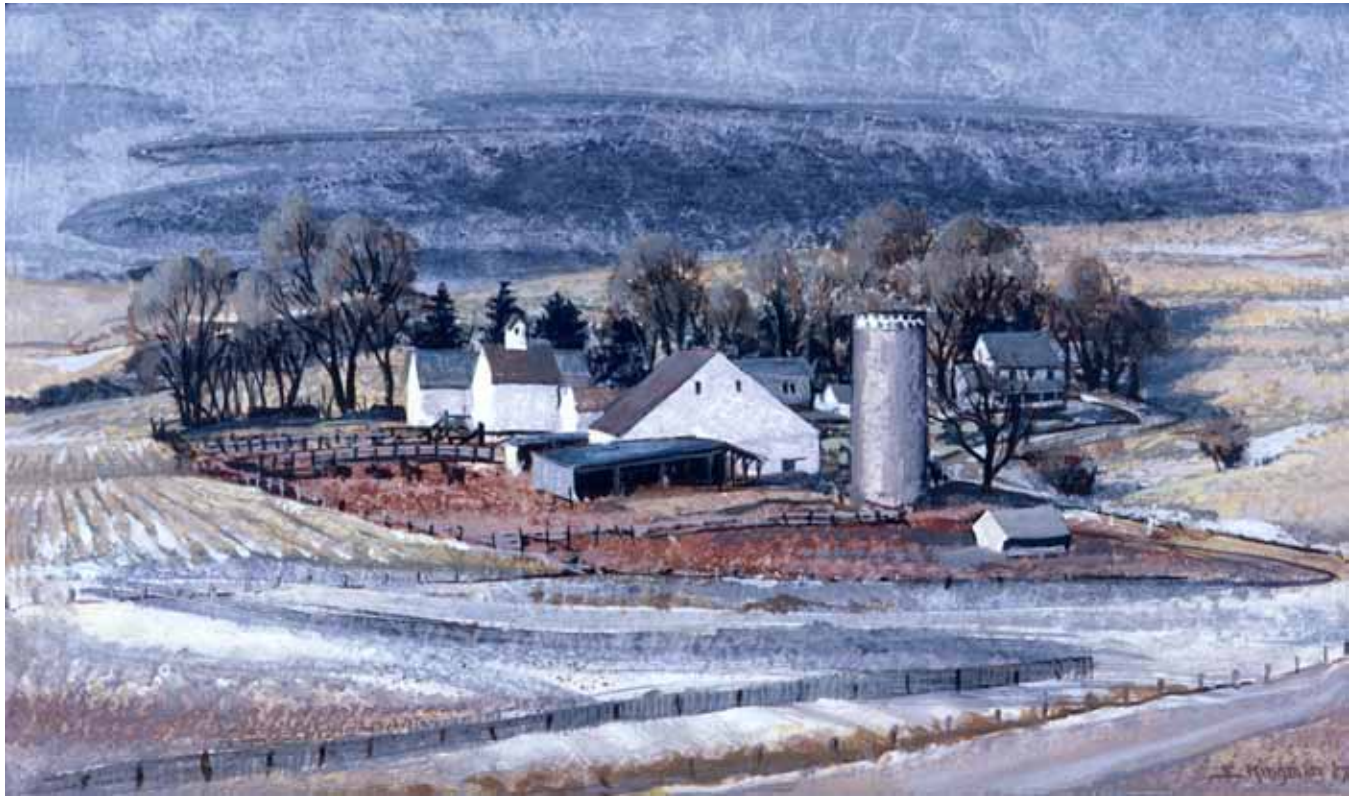
Scene near Omaha

Owned by Dr. & Mrs. Chester Q. Thompson, Jr. of Omaha

IN DEFENSE OF THE GENERALIST

In October, 1970, while a Senior at the University of Denver, Elizabeth A. Kingman interviewed her father, Eugene Kingman, for a college paper defending the importance of the "Generalist." The family feels that it gives valuable biographical insight, because it has direct quotations from her father which give some of his philosophy about art, artists, and exhibit design in museums – thoughts which are still relevant today.

Elizabeth G. Kingman



End of Winter
1967 – Acrylic
16x24" Frame

White Farm near Omaha

Owned by Dr. John H. Brush of Omaha

ART, ENVIRONMENT, and MUSEUMS

A well-known Artist Defends Generality

The relationship between culture and the creative arts plays a vitally important part in human life and learning. While history and science provide the who, what, where, when, how, and sometimes the why of life's events and proceedings, they do not communicate human feelings, emotions, and reactions as effectively as the creative arts do.

"Art is a reflection of culture as much as it is a part of it; and it is no less of an important factor than are history and science in attaining a thorough, working knowledge and understanding of human nature and affairs."

This remark sums up part of the basic philosophy of Eugene Kingman, a distinguished artist, lecturer, administrator, and creative consultant, who was recently appointed Director of the newly completed Museum at Texas Tech University in Lubbock Texas. His principle efforts have for many years been devoted to arousing greater public interest and awareness in art as an educational and communications medium as well as an entertaining one. In pursuing this aim, "relationships" is the key word he stresses:

"Art should not be isolated from everyday living experience. The ability to create – the need to express ideas, emotions, and perceptions — is part of being human, and is related to everything we do. The reason many art museums fail to attract a large percentage of public interest is simply because no real effort is made to relate the artwork with the surrounding environment when planning displays."



Fall Corn

1965 – Acrylic on Canvas
16x24" Frame

Field of corn near Omaha

Exhibited in January, 1966 at the Omaha Civic Opera Exhibition.
Purchased by J. R. MacAnally of Omaha

The sincerity and directness with which Mr. Kingman cultivates his artistic interests and follows his convictions is a reflection of a strict New England upbringing. Born and raised in Providence, R.I., Kingman's interest in art began about the age of three. The emphasis on discipline, efficiency, responsibility, the constructive use of time, plus interest and encouragement from his parents, can be noted as important factors in the artist's successful career.

A graduate of Yale University with a degree in Geography/Geology, Kingman also has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Yale School of Fine Arts. During his college years he was active in both painting and designing a variety of artwork for many Yale organizations, and his artistic ability began to win recognition during this time. In 1931, he was commissioned by the National Park Service to create a series of paintings of national parks to be exhibited in Paris, France. This international recognition opened the door to many more exciting opportunities in Kingman's career.

Among his many activities over the years, Kingman taught mural painting at the R.I. School of Design, and was the first Director of the Art Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma prior to World War II. During the war, he served in the U.S. Army as a cartographer, and as Chief of Presentation in the Map Division of the Office of Strategic Services in Washington, D.C. After the war, Kingman became Director of the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, where he remained for 23 years and raised his family. In addition, he served as a special outside consultant on exhibitions for both the Smithsonian Institution and the Smithsonian Gallery of Art.

Spier Farm #2

1965 – Acrylic on Canvas
24x40" Frame

West of Omaha

Also Called "Ten Mile Road"

Donated to Omaha Symphony fund raider



A gifted and creative Kingman uses his administrative ability and artistic talents to generate a continual flow of ideas. Those who work with him consider him a valuable inspiration in the museum world. His dramatic and moving oil and acrylic landscapes, expressing a style of impressionistic-realism, have won several honors and awards. Examples include paintings commissioned by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C., for the Crater Lake Museum in Oregon, and a lithograph purchased for the Joseph Pennell Collection in the Library of Congress.

His murals can be seen in the lobby of ***The New York Times*** Building, the Crompton-Richmond Company of New York, and in post offices in Rhode Island, Wyoming, and Maryland. His latest major work – a series of twelve paintings of water projects in Arizona - was recently completed for the Bureau of Reclamation, and adds to the long list of commissioned artwork.

In addition to his experience as a painter, the field of exhibit design is of special interest to Kingman, and he is noted for his innovative approach and thinking in this area.

"Exhibit design should have emphasis on the interpretation of art, history, and science subjects in meaningful relationships, and with regard to the environment."



Prairie Fall

1973 – Acrylic on Canvas
24x36" Frame

Fields near Omaha
Also called "Nebraska Farm Landscape"

Purchased by Harry Otis of Omaha

Kingman stresses the importance of relationships as being vital in attaining or maintaining broadened perspectives, which he feels are difficult to achieve and retain in the present day.

"Our advancing technology pressures us into becoming more and more specialized. This age of 'super-ness', speed, and materialism lures us into a giant web of departmentalized classification of code numbers and computers, that not only breed apathy, but also affects our perceptions and perspectives in that they become narrower and more limited.

"Nowadays we tend to center our attention upon one thing or another forgetting to maintain an overall general outlook at all times. When this happens, confusion and misunderstanding set in; and we so often find ourselves misled, or off on the wrong track."

Along the Lincoln Road #1
1953 – Oil on Canvas
24x40" Frame
Owned by Mrs. F.W. Lehmann, Jr. from Des Moines Art Center Invitation Show



Mr. Kingman further points out that the psychological and sociological disposition of our chaotic American culture has not only influenced the content and style of contemporary artwork, but has also affected the "administrative end" of creative professions, especially the museums.

"Among the various definitions of a work of art, the one that has special meaning for me is that a work of art is not a one-time experience. It has that quality that brings the viewer or listener back time and again; it never wears thin. This test can be applied to the stage, music, illustrative art – even post cards and comic strips. Taking, for a moment, illustrative art, I have found that in many cases a composition will or will not draw interest depending upon the way it is displayed. On a larger scale, the way in which museums handle their exhibits is a large factor in the degree of their popularity.

"Art as an educational and informative medium should also relax and entertain its audience. A museum should present a soothing and restful atmosphere into which a person can escape from the hustling–bustling world outside. He should be made to feel at ease – to sit or wander through the galleries leisurely absorbing as much or as little of the art as he wishes. The mood should allow him to reflect and unwind."



Skyline Farm

1967 – Acrylic on Canvas
18x30" Frame

Farm near Omaha

Owned by Edna Dowling Joslyn Librarian

"Yet all too often museums create an intense, moody atmosphere impressing the idea upon the visitor that he should cram as much information as possible into his head for the time he is there. With this feeling of 'forced education,' added to many times isolated, irrelative exhibits, repetitive in their display design, a visitor more often than not leaves the museum more exhausted, his feet aching, and his head filled with information soon forgotten.

"I am very sensitive to this fallback in museums in general; and I feel there are two important factors influencing this: (1) recent innovations in modern art have emphasized a focus on the physical nature of a composition rather than the aesthetic quality and feeling it expresses, and (2) it is difficult to find a general curator for museum employment. Being primarily involved with exhibit design, a curator who has a wide perspective, a general knowledge of art, and who has developed an overall skill to work with many aspects of art, media, and so forth, will be more versatile in designing exhibits, in working with various art media, and in general, will be more open to new ideas.

"However, the majority of museum curators and people in related fields, have a speciality and want to stay with it. This is a drawback because not only do exhibit designs tend to be redundant, but also in their specialization, curators generally neglect to illustrate important relationships between the artwork and its environment, and how it relates to the viewer."

Although determined and self-disciplined, Eugene Kingman is also enthusiastic, perceptive, and is always open to new ideas. When designing exhibits he keeps in mind a youth oriented focus and welcomes discussions, criticisms, attitudes, and opinions of the younger generation.

Fall Corn

1969 – Acrylic
24x40" Frame

Farm and hills near Omaha

Owned by Senator Roman Hruska.
Displayed in his Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.



"Art, per se, is examined by youth. They are broadened by it and sometimes reject it, but nevertheless, are spurred on by it, and at the right moment, take off on their own and come back with some highly imaginative, vital concepts that only youth can produce. This influences certain aspects of culture in all the arts."

With his emphasis on relationships and the desire to attract both the young and the old, Mr. Kingman's exhibits have been a great success in drawing public attention. At the new museum in Lubbock, Texas, his creativity is going at full force. With the aid of an enthusiastic staff, the permanent exhibits to be completely finished within the next two years, are sure to draw national interest to the museum. One of the main attractions in a room the size of an airplane hanger, will be a "sculptural mass" depicting what Kingman refers to as an "all purpose environment of our world." It will include all the creative areas – fine arts, physical sciences, history, geography, geology, the performing arts, evolution, etc. – which will be correlated into meaningful relationships, and enhanced by an elaborate lighting system, which will alter and add effects to the entire display.

"This project excites me more and more each day. Having the opportunity to show people an exhibit illustrating the important relationships within the universe, will hopefully foster more awareness of the need to think in more broadened and general perspectives. Everything is relative, directly or indirectly to everything else. Harmony and balance between things preserves life and beauty and peace. By seeing relationships we can also see extremes; and once we can see this, we can know and understand that all answers lie in the middle, between the extremes, amid the balance. There we will find harmony and peace."



Prairie Skyscraper

1952 – Oil on Casein
32x22" Frame

Grain elevators near Omaha

Owned by Northern Natural Gas Company (now known as InterNorth)

KINGMAN'S NEBRASKA

Snippets from the Archives

I conclude this informal perspective with excerpts from a declaration by Creighton University, when they presented my father with an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts in June, 1968.

Morning Sun

1958 – Oil on canvas?
20x30" Frame

Near Omaha

Owned by Mrs. Therlo Reckmeyer of Omaha



"The Cultural face of Omaha has changed dramatically in the past two decades and one of the motivating forces behind this change has been the director of the Joslyn Art Museum, Eugene Kingman.

"His accomplishments in the world of art are numerous and his influence on the community through the magnificent Joslyn Art Museum has been immeasurable. The dynamic growth in quantity and quality of art objects at Joslyn can be traced to the soft-spoken New Englander who assumed the directorship of the Museum in 1947. He has also been active in numerous other cultural endeavors both locally and nationally..."

"...The prolific Mr. Kingman has contributed many learned article and papers for publication and has held offices in a host of organizations... He has received a number of special honors and awards for outstanding promotion of the fine arts in the community.

"For his deep appreciation of the arts and his priceless personal contributions to this field and for being one the nation's outstanding art museum directors, Creighton University is privileged to confer upon Eugene Kingman the highest honor within her power, the degree of Doctor of Fine Arts, honoris, causa."

Excerpted from Creighton University statement, June, 1968



Nebraska Prairie Land, Corn Cribs
1958 – Oil on Canvas
18x12" Frame
Fall scene near Omaha
Commissioned by Mr. Ray Ginn of Omaha who wished to display both pictures as a pair.

KINGMAN'S NEBRASKA

Snippets from the Archives



Nebraska Prairie Land, Corn Harvest
1958 – Oil on Canvas
18x12" Frame
Fall scene near Omaha
Commissioned by Mr. Ray Ginn of Omaha who wished to display both pictures as a pair.