New exhibition showcases contemporary art inspired by Iowa and the significant changes in the land and agriculture over the last 25 years

AMES, IOWA - January 12, 2021 Twenty-five years ago the exhibition Land of the Fragile Giants: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples opened at the Brunnier Art Museum. The exhibition invited artists to visit the Loess Hills in western Iowa and create art inspired by the unique geological region. Twenty-five years later, in honor of the original exhibition, but also as a moment to observe and examine the drastic changes that have taken place in the state of Iowa, University Museums presents the new exhibition – Compelling Ground: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples of Iowa.

Like the original, artists were asked to create art inspired by Iowa, but instead of focusing on a singular region, the entire state was open for interpretation along with an added emphasis on the changes that have occurred. Not only is the Iowa landscape the most altered in the country, the changes that have occurred in the past twenty-five years have significantly affected the environments, landscapes, and people of this state. Each artist has represented their own sense of place within Iowa while reflecting those changes that have and continue to occur using various media and materials. In addition, a selection of art that was created for the exhibitio Land of the Fragile Giants provides a review of the original exhibition from twenty-five years ago provides insight into the original exhibition.

The exhibition is curated by Adrienne Gennett, Associate Curator of Collections and Education, University Museums.
“Land of the Fragile Giants perfectly exemplified how art can bring together communities to assert their voices and create change. It shed light on and beautifully represented the Loess Hills region. Compelling Ground aims to grow that impact, to share artistic interpretations of the many diverse areas found in Iowa, to address the significant change that has occurred, and hopefully engage communities to build paths forward in an effort to address the many issues Iowans are faced with presently,” said Gennett.

Compelling Ground: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples of Iowa opens on Monday, January 25 and runs through Friday, July 23, 2021 at the Brunnier Art Museum, located on the second floor of the Scheman Building on the Iowa State University campus, 1805 Center Drive, Ames. The revised Spring 2021 public hours for the Brunnier Art Museum are Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; closed weekends and University holidays. Admission is free, with a recommended donation of $8.

HEADER: Detail of Morning Observation, 2020 by Grant William Thye. Oil on canvas. On loan from the artist.

About the Artists

Nineteen artists contributed to the exhibition, creating a diverse range of art and installations with various media. Participating artists include: Mel Andringa, Jeff Baldus, Gary Bowling, Christine Carr, Rebecca Ekstrand, Fred Easker, Barbara Fedeler, Rose Frantzen, Pete Goché, Ingrid Lilligren, Mary Merkel-Hess, Joseph Muench, John Preston, Randy Richmond, Brian Roberts, Grant William Thye, Ellen Wagener, Joan Webster-Vore and Tilly Woodward.
Artists were also asked to provide statements about their art created for the exhibition and the inspiration behind each unique work of art.

“These paintings are an effort to slow down and take stock in the beauty of small, natural objects and the stories they tell us. An effort to take time to see one thing clearly, or a part of one thing clearly, each day.” ~ Tilly Woodward

“My artworks quietly speak about relationships – relationships with materials, the land and nature, my family and friends, and my Iowa roots.” ~ Jeff Baldus

“My landscape paintings are inspired by the environment around me, and through those paintings, I try to provoke both awe and gratitude in viewers who may have lost touch with the places where we live and travel through. Our sense of place is too important for its details to be overlooked or invisible.” ~ Gary Bowling

“My artwork is essentially an honest and pure response to my fascination with the agrarian architecture of Iowa that has surrounded me throughout my life. I have a thing for old sheds, silos, corncribs, and grain elevators, as well as the interconnectedness between these structures and the landscape, family farms, and small towns.” ~ Brian Roberts

“When thinking about Iowa’s changing landscape in spring of 2019, I considered many possibilities, the climate, state politics, the land, birds, butterflies, milkweed. But then the emerald ash borer came to mind, moving into Iowa from the east changing the Iowa landscape as mature, beautiful trees were and are being cut down across the state and I knew what I wanted to visually express.” ~ Joan Webster-Vore


About the Publication

A coordinating publication accompanies the exhibition and ties together the art with academic essays on the agriculture, science, and history of Iowa. The essays also include personal reflections from the authors about the land, people, and environment of Iowa with an emphasis on the significant changes that have occurred in the past twenty-five years and needs for the future. Topics include the history and current state of indigenous Iowans, climate change, water quality, sustainability, and the changing face of farming in Iowa.
“While 25 years seems a somewhat short amount of time, the change that has occurred to Iowa’s landscape, agriculture, environment, climate, and culture has been enormous. I believe it is important that those changes are represented in both the art created for *Compelling Ground* and the essays within the publication, as a way to recognize the past, attempt to understand the changes, and spark discussion about the future,” said Gennett.

Publication essayists include: Amber Anderson and Dr. C. Lee Burras; Dr. Angie Carter; Dr. Richard Cruse and Hanna Bates; Lance Foster; Adrienne Gennett; Dr. William Gutowski and Dr. Gene Takle; Cornelia Mutel; Patti Naylor; Lynette Pohlman; Dr. Thomas Rosburg; and Mary Swander. The 112-page full color publication will be available for purchase from the University Museums’ office during business hours and while visiting the exhibition. Cost is $30.00 each; cash, check or credit card accepted.

**COMPELLING GROUND**  
**LANDSCAPES, ENVIRONMENTS,**  
**AND PEOPLES OF IOWA**  

**Brunnner Art Museum**  

**Hours:** Monday - Friday open to the public 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM  
**Closed weekends and University holidays**  
**Address:** 2nd Floor, Scheman Building, 1805 Center Drive, Ames, Iowa  
**Admission:** The cost is free, however there is a suggested donation of $8

---

**Exhibition Programs**

Similar to ISU classes, University Museums will be offering a hybrid schedule of online and in-person educational programs through July 2021. Virtual programs can be viewed on the University Museums' [YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/c/ISUMuseums). For WebEx and in-person programs, please register in advance on the [University Museums website](https://museums.iastate.edu). Due to COVID-19 guidelines, in-person programs will have a limited number of seats available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

---

**ABOVE:** *Iron and Earth*, 2016 by Joseph Muench. Steel and wood. On loan from the artist.
Masks are required for all program attendees per Iowa State University policy. Seating will be placed 6 feet apart and we kindly ask that all attendees respect physical distancing. Chairs will be cleaned both before and after the program. Hand sanitizers will be available at the entrance to each museum.

**Compelling Ground Curator’s Exploration**
**Tuesday, February 1 - VIRTUAL PROGRAM**
With Adrienne Gennett, Associate Curator of Collections and Education
Take a virtual tour of the new Brunnier Art Museum exhibition *Compelling Ground: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples of Iowa.*

*Artist Talk with Tilly Woodward*
**Tuesday, February 9, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. - WEBEX PROGRAM**
With Tilly Woodward, Artist and Curator of Academic and Community Outreach, Grinnell College Museum of Art
A featured artist in the exhibition, Woodward will discuss her artistic practice, her interest in the landscape of Iowa and her paintings that are on exhibition. [Pre-registration is required](mailto:atrilg@iastate.edu) to receive the WebEx program link.

*A Performance with Mary Swander: Poetry, Farming, and More!*
**Sunday, March 28, 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. - WEBEX & IN-PERSON PROGRAM**
With Mary Swander, Former Poet Laureate of Iowa and emerita Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Iowa State University.
In-person livecast at the Brunnier Art Museum. Mary Swander is a leader in conversations about farming and the wider rural environment in Iowa through creative arts. Swander will read her poetry in this virtual program, which will be livecast in the Brunnier Art Museum or can be viewed on WebEx. [Pre-registration is required for either option](mailto:atrilg@iastate.edu).

**Panel Discussion: The Changing Face of Iowa Farming**
**Tuesday, April 13, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. - WEBEX PROGRAM**
With Hannah Breckbill, Shelley Buffalo, Dr. Angie Carter and Patti Naylor
Join a panel of experts as they discuss the changing face of farming in Iowa. Panelists include academics and practicing Iowa farmers who will examine the history and future of Indigenous, queer, and women farmers working the land while developing more sustainable farming practices in Iowa. [Pre-registration is required](mailto:atrilg@iastate.edu) to receive the WebEx program link.

*University Museums cannot guarantee an environment free of the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Visiting University Museums includes possible exposure to and serious illness from infectious diseases including but not limited to COVID-19. Visit at your own risk.*

*University Museums does recognize the possibility of a second outbreak and that things may change. The University Museums and ISU emergency teams will monitor this closely and facilities may have to close again. University Museums may make very quick decisions on shutdowns or cancellations due to capacity concerns, health precautions, staffing and occupancy-related considerations.*

---

The University Museums and ISU emergency teams will monitor this closely and facilities may have to close again. University Museums may make very quick decisions on shutdowns or cancellations due to capacity concerns, health precautions, staffing and occupancy-related considerations.
Compelling Ground is curated and organized by University Museums. The exhibition is supported, in part, by the Iowa Arts Council, a division of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Generous support was also given by: Dwight and Marilyn Conover; Debbie Hitchell in honor of Jon Fleming; Kate Gregory; Carole Horowitz; Betty and Dennis Keeney; Cal and Frankie Parrott; Dorothy and Robert Rust; Clifford Smith; and David and Marianne Spalding.

About University Museums
University Museums is a distinctive organization that encompasses two art museums, a National Historic Landmark historic home museum, a sculpture garden, and one of the largest campus public art collections in the nation. University Museums brings world-class exhibitions with educational programming to Iowa State University, actively acquires works of art to add to the more than 30,000 permanent collection objects, conserves and preserves collections, conducts and publishes curatorial scholarship, and fosters student engagement.

Media Information
For information about Compelling Ground, please contact Adrienne Gennett, Associate Curator of Collections and Education at 515-294-3342 or agennett@iastate.edu. To schedule interviews, photograph events or request high resolution images, please contact Betsy Grabinski at 515-294-3342 or betsyg@iastate.edu.