



# FLINT as muse HILLS

BY  
Michelle Leivan

Beverly Dodge Radefeld, *Rolling Hills* (2016), oil on canvas, (courtesy artist).

Traveling into the Flint Hills can be a meditative and restorative journey, an escape from the pressure of daily life. The region has been described as magical, mystical and majestic, but even these words may not articulate the essence of the Flint Hills. Where words fail us, art helps us understand the experience, the life, history and, most importantly, the sense of wonder the region evokes.

Venturing into the prairie grass-covered overlooks, easels packed, canvases in hand and wind-carried whispers from their muse in their ears, generations of artists have brought us their own visual poetry inspired solely from the Flint Hills.

Painting or drawing this landscape takes time. It takes noticing the subtle and the sublime, it takes a soul-stirring connection with the subject for an artist to be able to convey all that the land must say. There are many artists who have dedicated themselves to such a mission in the Flint Hills, and who have created stirring, beautiful responses.

They've connected with the Flint Hills Muse.

Though, some say it is a Muse that is rather hard to ignore.

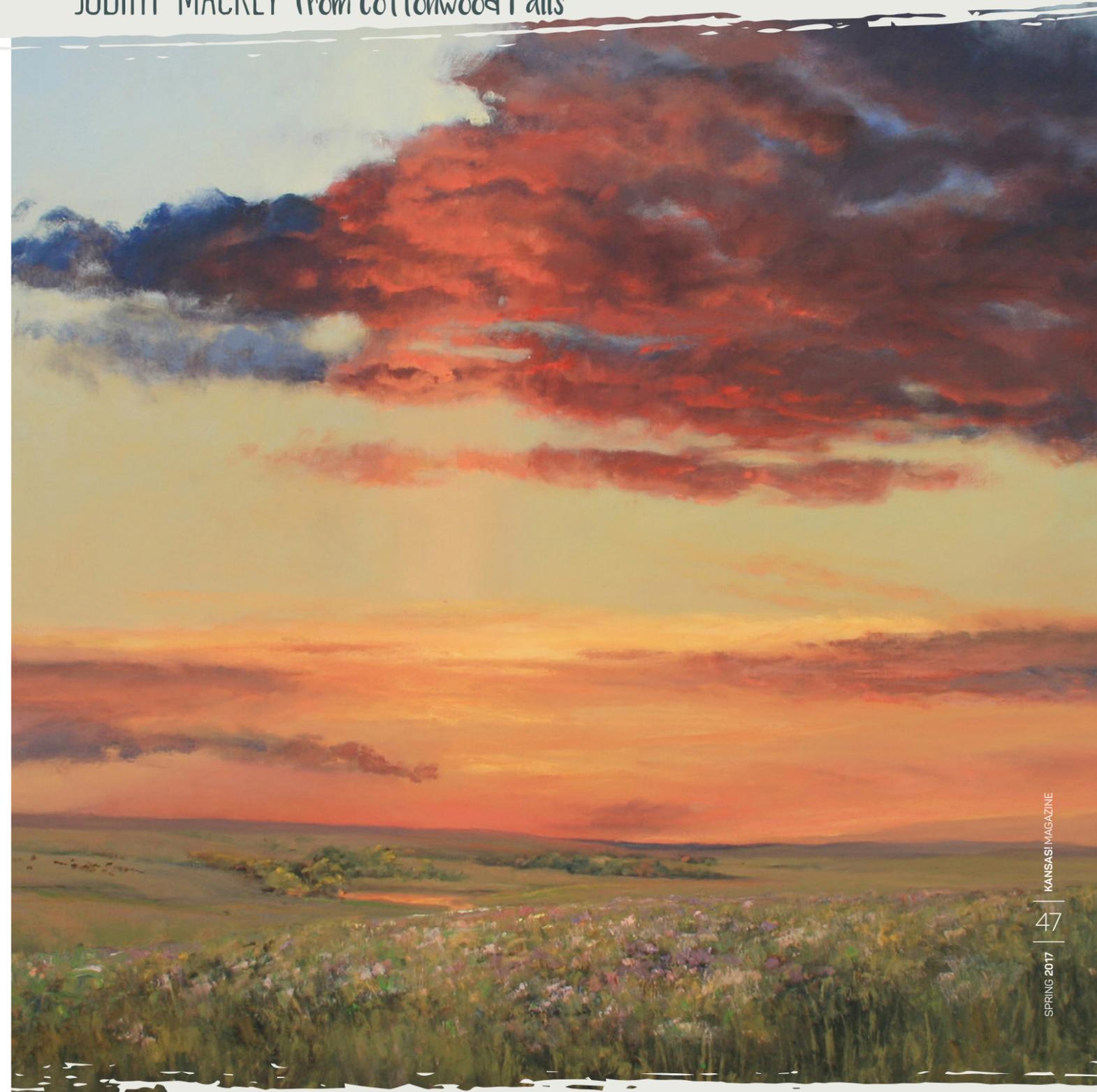
"I'll tell you about the Muse," offers Gary Blitsch, the longtime owner of SouthWind Art Gallery in Topeka. "All they must do is be present in the Flint Hills and they have a paintable, collectable subject. It doesn't matter what season, the Flint Hills will absorb you and bring you home to a comfortable, pleasant place that we all can identify with."

Not far from our Kansas homes, the Flint Hills is a place of beauty and universal appeal.

And here, in the following pages, a few Kansas artists have responded to the Muse of the Flint Hills, each in their own style and each with their own experience of the rolling, seemingly limitless land.

*"It doesn't matter what season, the Flint Hills will absorb you and bring you home to a comfortable, pleasant place that we all can identify with."*

-GARY BLITSCH  
OWNER, SOUTHWIND ART GALLERY



No collection of art inspired by the Flint Hills would be complete without the work of Judith Mackey, the Flint Hills painter who bases many of her works on the view from her back porch. Mackey also ventures farther into the hills for *plein air* adventure and has spent a lifetime documenting the region and filling her own spiritual pitcher. "I experience the presence of God in everything while I am out there," says Mackey. "It is something I am obligated to share."

Judith Mackey, *Land of Milk and Honey* (2016), oil on canvas (courtesy of the artist).



SPRING 2017 | 48 | KANSAS MAGAZINE



SPRING 2017 | 49 | KANSAS MAGAZINE

Perhaps more than any single artist, Louis Copt has popularized the image of the Flint Hills prairie fire burns. For 30 years, Copt has been returning to the annual events to receive inspiration for his canvases. “A lot of people see fire as destructive and to be avoided. Where on the prairie it is a rejuvenation and preparation for the next season,” explains Copt. “It is a symbol of hope and renewal.”

Louis Copt, *Prairie Heat* (2015), oil on canvas (courtesy of the artist).

Beverly Dodge Radefeld represents the Flint Hills through blocks of spirited color and riches within flowing brush strokes she applies on location. “You feel it clear down to your soul—it’s overpowering, and that is what I am trying to capture. That is the reason I use so much color to get that intensity into the painting,” says Radefeld. “Being there, experiencing it is a whole lot different than trying to recall it in your studio.” Working in the Flint Hills has also enriched her sense of how nature can trifle with our sense of distance and perspective. She describes how the vastness of the rolling prairie creates surreal perspectives. The Flint Hills are a place where you can see for miles and miles, where landmarks might appear to be just blocks away from one another, but are, in fact, miles apart.

Beverly Dodge Radefeld, *The Fields in the Flint Hills II* (2016), oil on canvas (courtesy of the artist).



**M**ichael Duane describes his first experience of the Flint Hills as an instant hook: “I was driving, I was mesmerized by these rolling hills—Kansas isn’t flat,” recalls Duane. “I stopped and started sketching, getting lost in the image, and my imagination exploded as I watched a thunderstorm rolling toward me begin to light up the sky.” That was 10 years ago, and since then the artist has continued to return to the region, capturing the sense of fantasy that it inspires through images of bold color and simplified landscapes in pastel.

Michael Duane, *Sunset Reflection Flint Hills* (2016), pastel (courtesy of the artist).

**F**or Zak Barnes, the Flint Hills landscape is reflected in the spirit it can inspire. It is an ethos reflected in the lives of people who work on it, reside around it, or simply take time to appreciate it. His series of works “Bazaar, Kansas” celebrate that *Ad Aspera* attitude. “When you are out there in the hills, you have a sense of ownership and belonging with a profound realization of being away from civilization,” says Barnes. “I paint relaxed people enjoying an imaginative, unplugged life without all the commotion of technology stimulus you find today.” **KM**

Zak Barnes, *Bazaar Race Day* (2016), oil on canvas (courtesy of the artist).