

## **Through the Eye of a Child: Nature Art**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is not the only remarkable venue to display art. During the 1940s, on a small farm in Southwestern Nebraska, three young Smith children, Norris, Margie, and Carole, filled the farm with ongoing exhibits of art—Nature Art. The children sculpted, shaped, and sketched their art in outdoor displays.

In a hidden playhouse between the bulging corn crib and the high-rising windmill, Margie and Carole rolled, patted, and pinched mud into bakery masterpieces. In their artist's workshop, Margie added water from the pumping windmill to a bucket of dirt. She slapped a blob onto the old board used as a table as if working with clay. Margie and Carole rolled and shaped the gooey mixture into pies, cookies, and cakes. They decorated their creations with grass, leaves, and lilacs in unique designs. For a finishing touch, Carole reached over and seized kernels of corn for a final colorful touch. They displayed their treasures on wooden boxes.

Their parents came to admire Carole and Margie's display case of appealing art shapes.

Margie was the Hollyhocks doll artist. She reached into the kitchen cupboard and grabbed five of her father's toothpicks. Margie plucked buds and pink flowers from her mother's Hollyhock bush. Under the shady Elm tree to the left of the yard gate, the young artist peeled away leaves that enclosed the Hollyhock bud. Using her toothpick, Margie made a small hole in the bottom of the bud—the doll's head. She placed the tiny stalk of a blooming flower into the hole to form a skirt for the Hollyhock doll.

She placed her solo gallery pageant of pink and white dolls on the front steps.

The Nebraska sky was filled with lightning bugs on a summer night, like neon signs advertising their wares. Norris gathered groups of lightning bugs in Mason jars.

His flashing light spectacle sat atop fence posts for viewing before Norris released the fireflies to fly free again.

The show stealer of Nature Art was the Grand Snow Horse. With the design and effort of older siblings, the Smith kids sculpted a horse of snow. A sawhorse confiscated from the garage sat as the frame for the creation. The young kids were

relegated to gathering piles of wet snow as the older ones squeezed, packed, patted, and shaped the magnificent horse. The horse stood on four sturdy legs, his ample body adorned with a colorful jacket for his saddle, his outstretched neck and head sported reins from the barn. Margie sat upright on the steed; a proud Mom pointed her box camera and snapped a photo of the Grand Snow Horse adorning the farmyard.

It was a sculpture grand enough to preside in the hall of a prominent art gallery.

Norris added another Nature Art display. He and his friends played marbles. The boys poured their prized marbles from cloth bags buried in their pants pockets and started a game. Inside a circle scratched in the dirt, the boys dumped Aggies with a mottling of bright colors and silver gleaming Steelies. The vibrant colors glistened in the sun.

The collective exhibition emerged as a stained-glass window.

Margie and Carole designed a hopscotch pattern in a patch of dirt with a twig as a sculpting tool. Carefully, they etched three square boxes, a set of two boxes side by side, a single box, another set of double squares, and the perfectly shaped half-moon at the top. Bits of colored glass thrown by the girls as they played hopscotch embellished the art piece.

It was a beautiful etching for a Nature Art Gallery.

Nature abounds with art. Its beauty is enhanced through the imagination of children.

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