

Grant Wood, “February,” 1940, Lithograph.

Grant Wood, best known for his much acclaimed “American Gothic,” was a prolific painter of American mid-western life; a style of painting he would come to call Regionalism. Focused on American rural and small-town scenes, this work responded to the pressures of the Great Depression by reaffirming the steadfast nature of the American constitution. Michaan’s Auctions is proud to offer an excellent example of this work, **Grant Wood, “February,” 1940, lithograph**, (\$10/12,000) in our February Gallery Auction on Friday, February 16th.

The lithograph is centered around three horses in the center of the frame, whose figures are divided by a fence constructed of three strands of

barbed wire. One horse is positioned much further in the foreground and takes up the majority of the left side of the image, while the horses in the middle distance comprise the center and center-right of the frame. Each horse’s gaze engages the viewer directly, although their eyes are not clearly rendered. At the right side of the frame are two vertically situated wooden sticks, one of which forms the fencepost;



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both are pulled towards the center of the frame, presumably by the wind which pulls the horses' reins in the same direction. Behind the horses is a series of white rolling hills, and in the far distance, a barn and silo can just be made out.

This lithograph alludes to the harshness of rural American life through the image of farm animals and extreme weather, which together comes to stand in for American ideals of steadfastness against challenging conditions. Additionally, the horses regard the viewer with a certain suspicion that emanates both from the gaze and positioning of each individual, as well as a limited group cohesion which is evident in their separated positioning but eerily similar manner. As a stand-in for American cultural values, this piece effectively represents the hardiness and

natural suspicion that constitutes the rural character.

This work departs in significant ways from the works usually associated with the "American Gothic" painter. Not only does this work askew the human subject matter typical of Wood, it also abandons the depictions of fertile farmland present in his landscape works. While Grant Wood's works would never be described as especially colorful, the lack of any color whatsoever in this lithograph is relatively unique in his body of work. This contributes to the sense of stark bleakness that is present in many of his other works, with the addition of a certain foreboding created by the eyeless stare of the horses, which is not typical of the artist.

Grant Wood was born in rural Iowa at the tail end of the 19th century, rising from humble origins to create one of the most enduring pieces of American

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art. After moving to Cedar Rapids as a young boy, he began an apprenticeship at a local metal shop, eventually performing silversmith work while studying at the Arts Institute of Chicago. After a brief stint in the US military at the end of World War I, Wood began teaching art in the Cedar Rapid public school system, which allowed him to travel to Europe during his summers. It was on one of these trips that he became influenced by the skilled technique of Jan van Eyck. After painting “American Gothic” in 1930, he exhibited his works widely, beginning at his alma mater, the Arts Institute of Chicago, and eventually joined the faculty at the University of Iowa’s School of Arts. A fierce proponent of regionalism, Wood continued to teach until his early death from pancreatic cancer in 1942.

Grant Wood, “February,”
1940, lithograph (\$10/12,000) will be offered at Michaan’s Auctions February Gallery Auction on Friday, February 16th, which features fine diamonds in excellent condition in addition to notable examples from the Fine Art and Asian Art departments. The auction is led by the jewelry department, which will be offering an unmounted pear-cut 2.45 carats colorless diamond and an unmounted pear- cut 2.96 carats colorless diamond. Also included in the sale is a painting by Thom Ross, an Arnaldo Pomodoro hanging sculpture, and a jade insert table screen.

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