



## Still and Silent Places: Paintings by J. F. Goff

March 1 – June 1, 2014

## Introduction by Kate Goff



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Lonely places deserted or destined to be; rolling and gentle hills sculpted by wind, erosion and man; the fascination of trees shaped by prairie winds; snow blanketing hills, woods and ponds; fence posts like lonely sentinels; and the sky—always the overwhelming presence of Midwestern skies.

These are the poignant landscapes that James F. Goff grew up in, longed for, returned to, and which provoked such awe and fascination with him his entire life.

His love of this very special place at the confluence of the Little Sioux, Big Sioux, Floyd and Missouri Rivers is a constant throughout his work.

His preferred medium was watercolor, and he was truly a master in this, most difficult, of mediums. There is no opportunity to begin all over again as there is with oil or acrylic. There is no masking of the hesitant line or brushstroke; in other words, there is no going back.

One's intent is what remains.

Throughout his life, James F. Goff went forward with love and compassion, little hesitation, and yet, there was always a longing for times, places, friends that he'd once known.

Fig. 1 *Misty Woods*, 1970, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27.5 inches  
From the collection of Royce and Charlene Barnum

Fig. 2 *Spring Thaw*, 1972, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Duane and Gayette Kennedy

cover

*North Ravine*, 1989, watercolor on paper, 14 x 21 inches  
From the collection of Nancy Boysen



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

His technique was simple, unique and yet each painting that he considered to be near to what he intended was a very complex matter indeed. He'd begin by soaking, pinning, and masking the paper to the board and then allow it to dry and shrink. Then he'd make a preliminary sketch—often no more than some lines indicating verticals and horizontals, rarely any details.

And then he'd begin to paint in one sitting, often late into the night. He never layered on color; he used the white or cream background of the paper itself as a fundamental element of every composition.

Watching him paint was to watch someone so thoroughly engrossed in the act of creating that it would have been a kind of sacrilege to speak out loud. He was absorbed in the fascination of the work itself.

His shy smile spoke volumes: he was a kind, compassionate and loving man. He wanted to share his vision of his own place on earth with others.

Fig. 3 *Snow Fence*, 1973, watercolor on paper, 13 x 20.5 inches  
From the collection of The Buckley Family

Fig. 4 *Broken Gate*, 1978, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
From the collection of James L. Goff

## Still and Silent Places: Paintings by J. F. Goff



Fig. 5

Fig. 5 *Old Homestead Revisited*, undated, watercolor on paper, 14 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Katie and Ron Colling



Fig. 6

Fig. 6 *Back Road*, 1971, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27.5 inches  
From the collection of James L. Goff

James F. Goff (1920-2007) was born in Two Harbors, Minnesota. Friends knew him as “Jim,” while collectors of his paintings know him by his signature, “J. F. Goff.” He moved with his family to Sioux City as a child and graduated from East High School. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps, remaining until the end of World War II. He flew 25 missions as a B-17 navigator. After his discharge, he returned to Sioux City, where he received a degree from Morningside College in 1950. He then received a Master of Fine Arts degree from Drake University. After teaching for one year in Humboldt, Iowa, he began teaching art at East High School in the fall of 1954 and continuing for the next 29 years. He also taught art at both Western Iowa Tech Community College and the Sioux City Art Center.

And Goff painted. For many years at the beginning of his teaching career, however, he did not paint with any regularity. But when he started painting seriously in the late 1960s, his life changed dramatically, and with it, our community’s appreciation of the beauty of its rural locations. In 1967, he submitted a watercolor painting titled *Wash Day* to the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company for inclusion in its 1968 calendar. *Wash Day* was one of 4,500 entries, but it was accepted and served as the image for March 1968. The painting featured a plain, two-story house,



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

surrounded by bare trees, with white laundry hanging on a line. While this scene was painted with charming detail, the landscape portions in this painting play a supporting role and were created with less meticulousness. That would change quickly.

With the confidence that came from his selection for the calendar, he decided to see if others might actually want to buy his paintings. He set a goal, one which would satisfy his curiosity about his skill as a painter, while allowing him to complete a decades-old dream. He would try to sell enough paintings to cover the cost of taking private flying lessons. It turned out this was not a problem. It also turned out that as much as Goff had wanted to become a pilot, he wanted to continue to paint the landscape around Sioux City even more.

As his career as a professional artist began, he stated that the personality of the Midwest “is best reflected by its old homesteads, barns and river scenes.”<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this was in keeping with the subjects often chosen by Iowa’s best known artist, Grant Wood. As Goff’s style matured, he shared Wood’s attention to detail and fascination with the rolling hills of Iowa. Yet Wood’s paintings of the land, though beautiful and sweet, do not attempt to recreate the sensation of a real encounter with the Iowa landscape. Goff

Fig. 7    Untitled, 1996, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Lee and Ruth Van Voorhis

Fig. 8    *The Storm*, 1982, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Dr. David and Joan Paulsrud



Fig. 9

Fig. 9 *The Hawk*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21.5 x 29 inches  
From the collection of Florence M. Goff



Fig. 10

Fig. 10 *Untitled*, 1980, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Carter and Corinne Holman

was standing in and looking directly at the landscape around Sioux City when deciding if he saw and felt something that was important. In fact, he stated simply, “I paint my feelings about Iowa.”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes these feelings have been interpreted as sadness. Winters around Sioux City are not especially gentle or comforting, and Goff seemed to find a special pleasure in allowing the white of his watercolor paper to serve as the color of snow. He joked in 1981, that he heard someone who was looking at his paintings say that Goff “must have had an unhappy childhood.” Goff said simply, “I don’t mean for them to be melancholic. They’re just quiet paintings. Hopefully they reflect my mood—my personality.”<sup>3</sup>

That idea is reflected in the title of this exhibition. *Still and Silent Places* is a phrase written years ago by Kate Goff, one of the artist’s daughters who also wrote the lovely introduction in this catalogue, to describe what her father’s works represent. Of course, these places are not literally without motion and sound. It’s hard to think of the environment around Sioux City without the wind whistling through the trees and grass, for example. Instead, the places in Goff’s paintings are still and silent in their modesty and in their seclusion from the noise and activity of contemporary life.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

There is a straightforward honesty in Goff's paintings, seen in his avoidance of the clichés of landscapes. We will not find the range of hues that come from dazzling sunrises and sunsets. Though Goff did not exclude bright colors from his work, we will not find in his body of work an emphasis on the blossoms of spring, the brightness of summer, or the warm colors of autumnal trees.

As reflections of Goff's personality, his landscapes rarely include a direct human presence in the scenes, and even then he shows how relatively small they are in relation to the land itself. There are no heroic people battling the wind and snow or doing any of the difficult labors of farming. Instead, we have the humble houses, barns, fences, fields, and roads that are the survivors of years of human activity. Goff was aware of the passage of these manmade structures from utility and life to abandonment and decay. Even the open fields would one day find themselves changed. When discussing the location he depicted in *Before the Storm*, Goff remarked, "It is soon to be overrun by bulldozers and new houses and I felt an urgency to record the scene before it was changed forever."<sup>4</sup>

The lowan landscape that first inspired Jim Goff to paint nearly a half century ago continues to change. Likewise, a short drive out of Sioux City finds many similar settings still

Fig. 11 *The Stragglers*, 1982, watercolor on paper, 28 x 39 inches  
From the collection of Great Southern Bank

Fig. 12 *Winter Fields*, 1989, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Anne Marie Langlois



Fig. 13

Fig. 13 *Rain Puddles*, undated, watercolor on paper, 10 x 14 inches  
From the collection of Dennis and Jackie Smith



Fig. 14

Fig. 14 *Family Reunion*, 1981, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Rebecca Goff

enduring time and weather, making his precise watercolors seem remarkably fresh. Goff found in these quiet places a special dignity and calm, which, even today, continue to profoundly touch us.

As the Sioux City Art Center celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it takes pride in presenting this exhibition of Jim Goff, Siouxland's finest painter of its rural countryside. The Art Center is grateful to the Goff family for its indispensable assistance in organizing this exhibition and for the many, many lenders of paintings to the exhibition.

- 1 Quote included in notes on the March 1968 appointment calendar page produced by Northwestern Bell Telephone Co.
- 2 Quoted in *Des Moines Register*, October 12, 1975, "Still and silent places," Gail Casterline, pp. 17-18.
- 3 Quoted in *Sioux City Journal*, June 22, 1981, "Siouxland is artist's inspiration," Jean Novotny, p. A1.
- 4 Quote included in notes on the November 1974 appointment calendar page produced by Northwestern Bell Telephone Co.





Fig. 15



Fig. 16

The Sioux City Art Center has admired the paintings of Jim Goff since 1949 when one of his watercolors, *Back Road*, was selected for the *Fifth Annual Iowa Watercolor Show* and exhibited at the Art Center. When Goff's painting, *Distant City*, was included in the *Ninth Annual Iowa Watercolor Show* in 1953, the Art Center purchased it for its permanent collection. The Art Center has continued to collect his work over the years and now has six paintings in its permanent collection. In addition to *Distant City*, these include *Before the Storm* (1974, included in this exhibition); *The Red Barn* (1977); two Untitled landscapes from 1983; and an Untitled portrait.

In 1971, the Art Center presented its first exhibition of Goff's work. *Watercolors by J. F. Goff* was on display May 17 – June 20, 1971. Two paintings from this exhibition are included in the current exhibition: *Back Road* and *Misty Woods* (then titled *Ground Fog*). A second exhibition, *Watercolors by James F. Goff*, was presented by the Art Center, March 17 – April 14, 1979. *The Hawk*, *Winter Shadows*, and *Winter's Wane* were among the paintings first presented at the Art Center in this 1979 exhibition.

This 2014 exhibition, the first exhibition of Goff's work drawn mostly from private collections, is a celebration of his enduring artistic presence in the community.

Fig. 15 *Before the Storm*, 1974, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
Sioux City Art Center Permanent Collection; 976.01  
Purchased with funds provided by the  
Robert B. Howe Memorial Fund

Fig. 16 *Winter's Wane*, 1976, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of E. C. and Margaret Farrell and Jean Farrell



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Fig. 17 *The Old Barn*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29.5 inches  
From the collection of Althea Goff

Fig. 18 *The Big Red Barn*, 1986, watercolor on paper, 14.5 x 21.5 inches  
From the collection of Del Gamble

Fig. 19 *Winter Shadows*, 1977, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Don and Mary K. Schenk

Fig. 20 *Untitled*, 1972, watercolor on paper, 13.5 x 20.5 inches  
From the collection of Carter and Colleen Dennis

back cover

Fig. 21 *Winter Wind*, 1984, watercolor on paper, 11 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Holly and Larry Sales

Fig. 22 *Valley Farm*, 1985, watercolor on paper, 14 x 21 inches  
From the collection of Fred and Kathy Rizk

Fig. 23 *Untitled*, 1974, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 13.5 inches  
From the collection of Donald L. and Janice Mohan

## Exhibition Checklist

*Black Angus*, 1970, watercolor on paper, 20 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Duane and Gayette Kennedy

*Marshland*, 1970, watercolor on paper, 13 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Duane and Gayette Kennedy

*Misty Woods*, 1970, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27.5 inches  
From the collection of Royce and Charlene Barnum  
(Fig. 1)

*Back Road*, 1971, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 27.5 inches  
From the collection of James L. Goff  
(Fig. 6)

*Barbed Wire*, 1971, watercolor on paper, 12.5 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Duane and Gayette Kennedy

*Spring Thaw*, 1972, watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Duane and Gayette Kennedy  
(Fig. 2)

Untitled, 1972, watercolor on paper, 13.5 x 20.5 inches  
From the collection of Carter and Colleen Dennis  
(Fig. 20)

*Snow Fence*, 1973, watercolor on paper, 13 x 20.5 inches  
From the collection of The Buckley Family  
(Fig. 3)

*Before the Storm*, 1974, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
Sioux City Art Center Permanent Collection; 976.01  
Purchased with funds provided by the Robert B. Howe Memorial Fund  
(Fig. 15)

*Big Sioux Farmstead*, 1974, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Nancy Boysen

Untitled, 1974, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 13.5 inches  
From the collection of Donald L. and Janice Mohan  
(Fig. 23)

*Bacon Creek*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Dr. David and Joan Paulsrud

*The Hawk*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21.5 x 29 inches  
From the collection of Florence M. Goff  
(Fig. 9)

*The Old Barn*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29.5 inches  
From the collection of Althea Goff  
(Fig. 17)

*Prairie Gold*, 1975, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Florence M. Goff

*Winter's Wane*, 1976, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of E. C. and Margaret Farrell and Jean Farrell  
(Fig. 16)

*Winter Shadows*, 1977, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Don and Mary K. Schenk  
(Fig. 19)

*Broken Gate*, 1978, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
From the collection of James L. Goff  
(Fig. 4)

*Twilight Gold*, 1980, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
From the collection of James L. Goff

Untitled, 1980, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Carter and Corinne Holman  
(Fig. 10)

*Family Reunion*, 1981, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Rebecca Goff  
(Fig. 14)

*The Storm*, 1982, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 28 inches  
From the collection of Dr. David and Joan Paulsrud  
(Fig. 8)

*The Stragglers*, 1982, watercolor on paper, 28 x 39 inches  
From the collection of Great Southern Bank  
(Fig. 11)

*Windswept Fields*, 1984, watercolor on paper, 18 x 29 inches  
From the collection of Rebecca Goff

*Winter Wind*, 1984, watercolor on paper, 11 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Holly and Larry Sales  
(Fig. 21)

*Woodbury Winter*, 1985, watercolor on paper, 28 x 39 inches  
From the collection of Great Southern Bank

*Hunters' Lodge*, 1985, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Carter and Corinne Holman

*Valley Farm*, 1985, watercolor on paper, 14 x 21 inches  
From the collection of Fred and Kathy Rizk  
(Fig. 22)

*The Big Red Barn*, 1986, watercolor on paper, 14.5 x 21.5 inches  
From the collection of Del Gamble  
(Fig. 18)

*North Ravine*, 1989, watercolor on paper, 14 x 21 inches  
From the collection of Nancy Boysen  
(cover)

*Winter Fields*, 1989, watercolor on paper, 21 x 28.5 inches  
From the collection of Anne Marie Langlois  
(Fig. 12)

Untitled, 1996, watercolor on paper, 21 x 29 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Lee and Ruth Van Voorhis  
(Fig. 7)

*Rain Puddles*, undated, watercolor on paper, 10 x 14 inches  
From the collection of Dennis and Jackie Smith  
(Fig. 13)

*Old Homestead Revisited*, undated, watercolor on paper, 14 x 20 inches  
From the collection of Katie and Ron Colling  
(Fig. 5)

*Wagon in the Snow*, undated, watercolor on paper, 14 x 21 inches  
From the collection of Dr. Carter and Corinne Holman



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

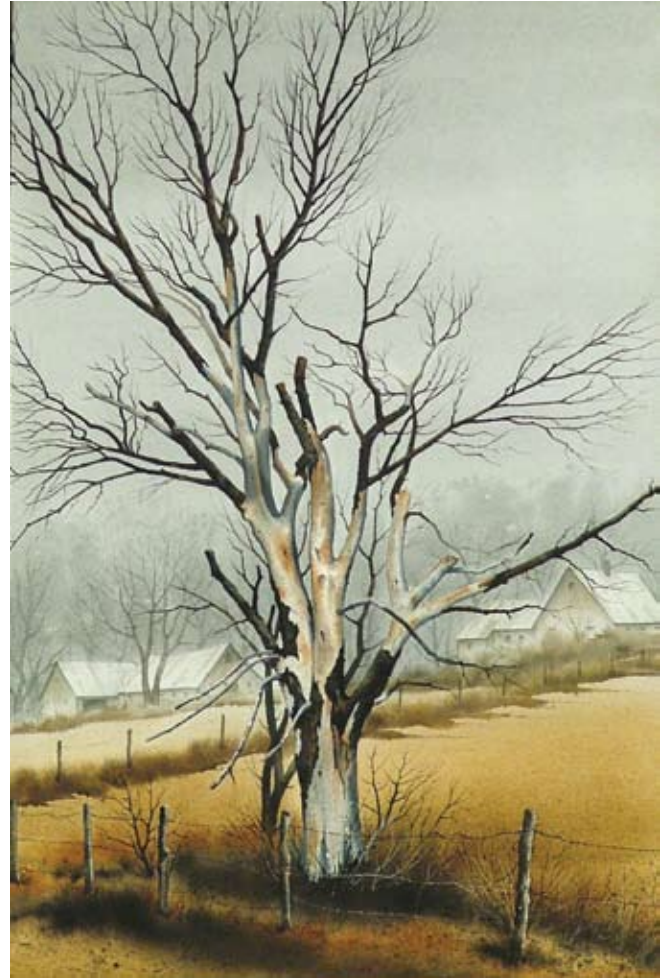


Fig. 23

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