

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12, 2016

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Paintings by Ella Amelia Gardner (1914-2007) open a window to Wisconsin's past.

MADISON, WISCONSIN – The Wisconsin Regional Arts Program has honored the artist Ella Amelia Gardner (1914-2007) with a solo exhibition of twenty paintings at the Steenbock Gallery (Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters at 1922 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin). The exhibition is ongoing through March 12, 2016, during business hours, with the reception on Saturday, February 27, 12:00-2:00 pm.; both are free and open to the public.

Ella Gardner's art explores Wisconsin culture, family life, nature, and the Amish world. The featured paintings in this exhibition depict historical scenes of twentieth century rural life in central Wisconsin from her Amish Series and Rural Life Series. Ella Gardner's paintings were widely exhibited in Wisconsin, and are especially interesting today for contemporary viewers as they vividly illustrate Amish culture and an era of once-commonplace rural life that has virtually vanished, with scenes including a barn-raising, lumbering with a horse-drawn sleigh, hand-milking in a lantern-lit barn, and horse-and-buggy transportation.

Ella Gardner was born in Wingville, Wisconsin in 1914, and also lived in Neillsville, Granton and Marshfield. She was the daughter of farmers Gina and Robert Haines, a grandniece of Wisconsin's 24th Governor, John J. Blaine, and taught in a rural school for two years. In 1937 she married fellow teacher Russell Gardner, and they raised three sons and operated a dairy farm in Granton, Wisconsin for forty years before moving to a smaller retirement farm in Marshfield, Wisconsin.

During her lifetime, Ella Gardner was a celebrated Wisconsin artist. She began her formal art education at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1936. Her art career began in earnest in 1964 after her youngest son left home to attend college. She quickly began to be recognized for her efforts, finding an artistic home in the Wisconsin Regional Arts Program (WRAP). For forty years she participated extensively in WRAP and exhibited her work at the Central Wisconsin State Fair, receiving many awards. Her art was also shown in solo shows in Granton, Neillsville, Marshfield, Menomonie, Wisconsin Rapids, Fort Atkinson and Madison, including an exhibit in the Governor's Office in Madison in 1983.

A versatile artist with an eye for color and expression, Ella Gardner worked in many mediums, including oil, pastel, acrylic, mixed media, collage, watercolor, scratchboard, pencil, and ink; saying, “the subject matter often dictates the medium.” In 1998, she published a catalog, “A Celebration of Life” (ISBN: 0-9662567-0-0), which features a selection of her paintings and drawings accompanied by personal narrative.

Helen Klebesadel, the director of the Wisconsin Regional Arts Program and the curator of the exhibit, said, “Ella Gardner’s legacy continues as a model of how someone can embrace the arts and celebrate their world. Likewise, Ella Gardner’s family is a wonderful example of how to celebrate the artists you know in life and in maintaining their legacy.” Gardner’s family has preserved her paintings and worked with WRAP to facilitate this exhibition. The website Ellagardnerart.com allows viewing of selected examples of her work, and offers the catalogue and selected prints via special order. In 2008, the Gardner family established the Ella Gardner Award to be awarded annually at the WRAP State Exhibition to recognize exceptional artwork with a rural theme.

The striking paintings featured in the Ella Amelia Gardner Paintings exhibition will be of keen interest to casual viewers as well as those with an interest in art, Wisconsin history, and rural culture. The featured paintings on display include include “The Big Log,” (mixed media on hardboard, 2’ x 4’), and Quilting Party (ATTACHED: oil on canvas, 16” x 20”), as well as five additional piece from the Rural Series. Thirteen paintings from her Amish Series are also available for viewing, including “Barn Raising” and “The Amish Kitchen (all are acrylic on hardboard, 20” x 24”).

Support for this exhibition has been collaboratively provided by the Wisconsin Regional Arts Program (WRAP), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Continuing Studies, and the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters.

The public is invited to stop by and see the exhibition and to join Gardner’s family at the reception Saturday, February 27th, 2016, noon to 2:00 p.m. We will celebrate the timeless energy of creative expression and the meaning of building a full life.

WRAP/WRAA

Since 1940 the Wisconsin Regional Arts (WRAP) has encouraged the creative growth of Wisconsin non-professional artists from rural areas with exhibits and workshops. WRAP is developed and administered by the UW-Madison, Division of Continuing Studies. The Wisconsin Regional Arts Association (WRAA) was founded in 1954 to support WRAP and is a non-profit organization. For more information, please contact: Helen Klebesadel, hrklebesadel@wisc.edu, (608) 262-3056, or visit <http://www.wisconsinregionalarts.org>.

Ella Gardner Originals

Ellagardnerart.com displays selected paintings by Ella Gardner and offers catalogues and selected prints for purchase. For more information, please contact Linda Gardner Phillips, linda@gardnerphillips.com, (312) 952-9511 or visit <http://www.ellagardnerart.com>.

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