

THE GREAT MIGRATION

A Celebration of Sandhill Cranes in Nebraska



January 19 - June 19, 2021
Artwork by Jude Martindale

great plains
ART MUSEUM

The Great Migration:

A Celebration of Sandhill Cranes in Nebraska

Cranes have claimed a special place in people's hearts for millennia. They are found in petroglyphs in Utah, in texts from ancient Greece and Rome, and have long been revered as a symbol of happiness and longevity in Asia.

In March and April, Nebraska is a stopover place for over one million Sandhill cranes, mostly along the central Platte River. It is the largest gathering of cranes in the world and one of the most popular of all wildlife migrations. Thousands of people visit Nebraska to see these birds and to reconnect with nature.

The Great Migration celebrates this annual wildlife spectacle and the unique lives of these elegant birds. The artist, Jude Martindale, uses several different artistic styles to interpret her experiences with the cranes in ways that reveal not only their personalities, but also her emotional reactions to watching their captivating behaviors.

Jude Martindale grew up in rural Nebraska and currently lives and paints in Lincoln. She received a B.S. from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, studied portraiture at the Art Students League of New York, and earned an M.S. in Scientific Illustration from the University of Arizona. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions. Martindale illustrated the 2020 book *Flying Free* that showcases some of her crane art. Her crane cards, prints, and book are sold at the Crane Trust, International Crane Foundation, and Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary to support their important work in crane conservation.



All works in the exhibition are by Jude Martindale and on loan courtesy of the artist.

Learn more about the artist and her work by visiting her website: judymartindalefineart.com, or contact her at jude.martindale@gmail.com



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Crane Fever #3
2016
Acrylic on canvas



Crane Fever #2
2016
Acrylic on canvas



Crane Fever #1
2016
Acrylic and textured gesso on canvas

Some crane behaviors have been around for millions of years—these birds are often portrayed as primordial. But they never stopped evolving, and still push the limits of their physical capabilities. Challenging each other with their athleticism, jumping can be infectious as it spreads through the group.

For *Crane Fever #1*, the artist applied textured gesso to create a fossilized effect, symbolizing the ancient lineage of modern cranes.



Thrill of the Dance
2017
Acrylic on canvas

Both sexes dance. It takes a lot of learning and practice for young birds to get good at it. Some basic dance moves are ubiquitous, but individuals add their own style and possibly unique moves.

Cranes dance for several reasons: sometimes solo for joy and practice, perhaps showing off for onlookers, and sometimes as provocation that can become aggressive. On the Platte River, we often see unmated birds trying out their courtship dancing as they look for compatible mates. Long-term pairs may also dance on the river, with nuanced and synchronized moves developed from years of being together. Crane dancing looks like fun, but also reveals much about physical fitness and the ability to be a good mate.



Synchronicity
2018
Acrylic on canvas

Sandhill cranes mate for life, and some live more than twenty years. Mates stay together year-round, keeping close to each other throughout migration even as they fly or roost in large flocks. They recognize each other's calls and are highly stressed if they become separated, calling and searching until reunited. *Synchronicity* portrays the emotional strength of this pair bond.



Showing Off
2020
Acrylic on canvas

This life-sized Sandhill crane is showing off the size and condition of his wings and feathers. It is a display often used when a crane lands in a crowd or is in the midst of a restless group. It can be a threat, but also a dance move. The ruffled neck is part of the show.



Flock in Flight

2019

Gold, silver, copper leaf and acrylic on canvas



Dancing to the Technicolor Beat
2020

Acrylic, glitter and foil paper, aluminum leaf
and vinyl on canvas

Crane dancing can include startling and unpredictable moves. This metaphorical painting symbolizes the colorful and sometimes outlandish breaks from “normal” bird behavior that are crane dances.



Prairie Dream
2018
Acrylic on canvas

Sandhill cranes nested in Nebraska until the early twentieth century. The flying crane in the background of *Prairie Dream* is ethereal, commemorating this once common summer resident.



The Dance Begins

2017

Iridescent stainless steel paint, iridescent and metallic acrylic, micaceous iron oxide and aluminum leaf on canvas



The Dance Continues

2017

Iridescent stainless steel paint, iridescent and metallic acrylic, micaceous iron oxide and aluminum leaf on canvas



Crane Tango
2019
Acrylic on canvas

In the fields and on the river, cranes make a sport of tossing objects as high as they can. They will grab corn cobs, clumps of algae, sticks, or whatever is close. *Crane Tango* is a fanciful take on what they would do if roses were available.



Seven Individuals
2017
Acrylic on canvas

Cranes are masters of body language, including facial expressions. The red crown is a patch of skin that changes in size and brightness to indicate interest or excitement.



Crane of Another Color

2017

Hand-stained paper and acrylic on canvas

Unlike humans, cranes can see in the ultraviolet range, which affects how colors look to them.
Who knows what it is like to see the world through the eyes of a crane?



True Colors

2018

Acrylic on canvas

Sandhill cranes are one of very few species of birds who purposefully paint their feathers a different color. In the breeding season, they use clumps of iron rich clay or vegetation soaked in rust colored water as a paint brush. They stain their gray feathers brown for camouflage from predators. By the time the birds arrive in Nebraska, most of the brown feathers have been molted and replaced with natural gray ones.

But what if the cranes had more colors available, and camouflage wasn't an issue? *True Colors* answers that question!

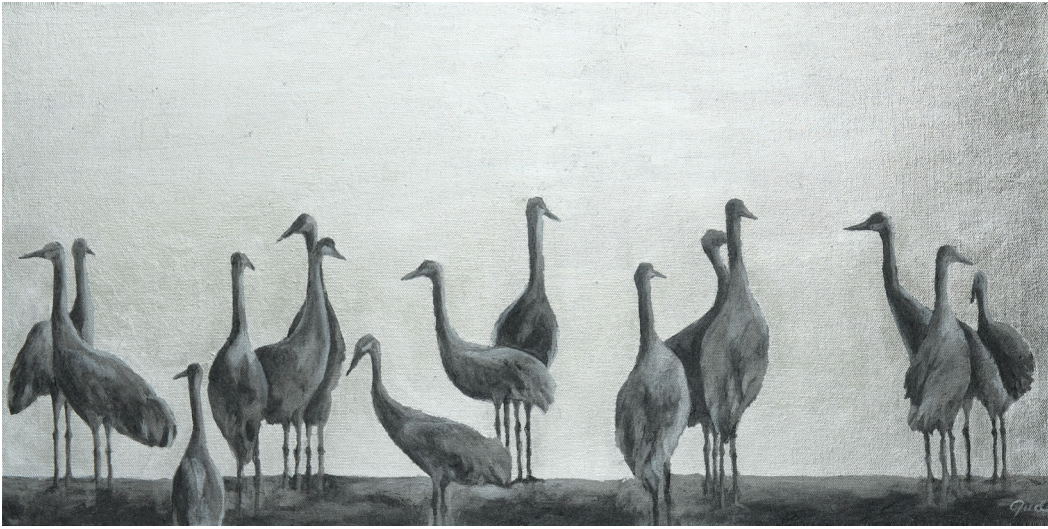


Morning on the River

2018

Acrylic on canvas

A preening bird with her feathers fluffed enjoys tranquility in the midst of a lively flock.



*By the Light of the
Silvery Moon*
2019
Acrylic, micaceous
iron oxide, aluminum
leaf on canvas



Moonlit Walk
2020
Aluminum leaf and
acrylic on canvas

Voices in the Mist
2018
Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas

Early morning fog on the Platte River made it impossible to see the birds, but they announced themselves with their voices as they called to each other. A truly mystical morning.





Passing Through
2019

Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas

The mid-continent population of Sandhill cranes migrates from southern wintering grounds to nesting territories in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia. They stop in Nebraska to rest and replenish their fat stores before continuing. Unlike most birds, cranes fly during the day on migration, and learn migration routes and food sources from their parents and other members of the flock.



Springtime Joy
2020

Acrylic and gold, aluminum, and copper leaf on canvas



Homeward Bound
2018

Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas



On Silver Wings
2018
Aluminum leaf and acrylic on canvas



Passing Through #2
2019
Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas



Homeward Bound #2
2019
Aluminum leaf and acrylic on canvas



Blue Moon #1
2018
Aluminum leaf and acrylic on canvas



Blue Moon #2
2018
Aluminum leaf and acrylic on canvas



Moon Dance
2018
Acrylic on canvas



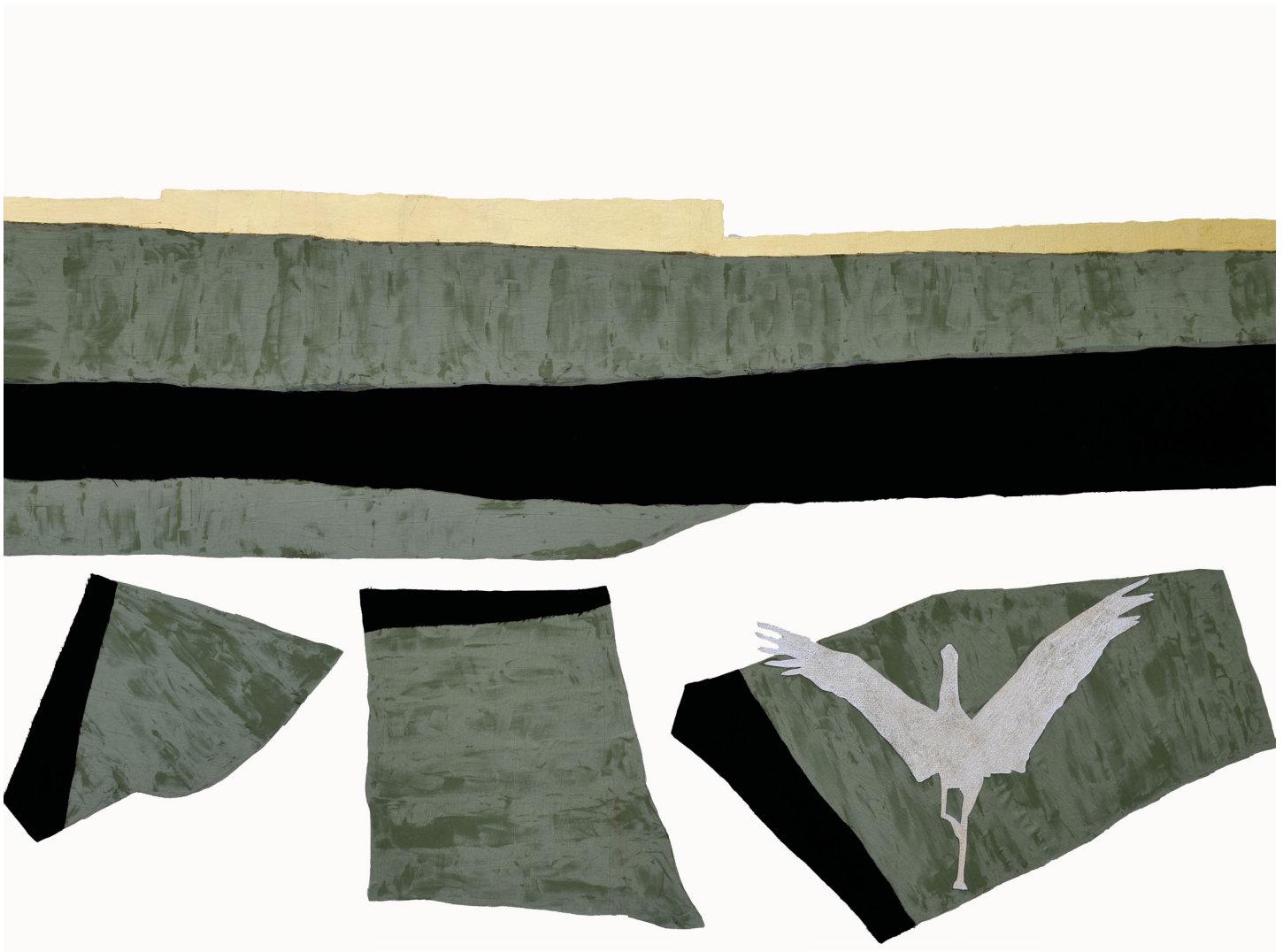
Moonlight Serenade
2019
Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas



Unison Call
2018
Acrylic and aluminum leaf on canvas



Mates for Life
2019
Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas



Will the Crane Survive?

2019

Fabric, gold and silver leaf on canvas

The population of Sandhill cranes is stable and has been expanding, though hunting threatens to take more birds than the annual replacement rate. Nebraska is the only place in the central flyway that does not allow hunting of cranes.

Until about 1900, much of the Midwest was covered with wetlands, the cranes' primary habitat. Today, little is left of those rich food sources, and the birds survive mostly on leftover corn while they are here. The Platte River provides much less roosting area than in the past, so hundreds of thousands of birds squeeze into small parts of the river, especially in areas that have been restored to provide optimal habitat. The crowding is stressful, exhausting, and adds the risk of disease outbreaks. Conservation work is expanding suitable areas along the Platte River to provide more space for the flock.

In *Will the Crane Survive?* the disjointed blocks of land symbolize the fractured habitat on which cranes must now survive. Black bands are the diminished rivers and streams, while gold is hope for the future. The crane is portrayed in silver leaf. Depending on the lighting, the crane can appear to be lively or ghostly, reflecting her uncertain outlook as she surveys her surroundings.



The Whooper Among Us

2019

Acrylic on canvas

Whooping cranes are the tallest birds in North America, larger than Sandhills, and brilliant white. They were hunted to virtual extinction for their feathers and used for fashion and quill pens. In 1940 only about twenty birds survived. Thanks to heroic conservation efforts there are now over 500 wild descendants in the central flyway flock. They do not stay in Nebraska long as they migrate through, traveling solo or in small groups, so they are not often seen. Occasionally, though, whooping cranes join Sandhills on the river. *The Whooper Among Us* is showing the smaller Sandhills what a real crane looks like.

Based on a photo by Nancy Schmidt.



The Flock
2020
Acrylic on canvas

At times, tens of thousands of Sandhill cranes fill stretches of the Platte River as far as the eye can see. These birds spend the night standing on sand bars in shallow water for protection from predators.

The Flock represents the masses of birds that may at first seem identical and anonymous. It captures a quiet early morning, before some of the cranes begin to play, dance, and compete in aggressive contests. As we take a closer look at what individual birds do, we see a wide range of personalities and behaviors.



Flying Free
2019
Acrylic on canvas

Avian perceptions and thoughts are of course different from ours, but their actions resonate with our sense of self and purpose. To know the cranes is to know of shared experiences, shared emotions, shared goals, to know that life's adventures are not ours alone.

This self-portrait of the artist taking flight with a crane inspires us to strengthen our bonds with nature.



Learn more about the artist and her work by visiting her website:
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