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Dolman, Flack, and Wells:

A Trio of Western Oklahoma Women Artists



Loreta Flack, LaMonte Dolman, and Joyce Wells

The connecting link between the art of LaMonte Dolman, Loreta Flack, and Joyce Wells is a stretch of rock-patterned Armstrong Treadway running from my hallway through the kitchen and out toward the utility room. LaMonte, Loreta, and Joyce are the three Western Oklahoma women artists whose work I own and hang in my home.

I bought LaMonte Dolman's ink wash of the First Presbyterian Church in Walters. Loreta Flack's oil of a lonely windmill was a gift from the artist. And I acquired Joyce Wells' painting of a family gas well by conning an instructor of the (then) Southwestern

State College into giving away college property.

LaMonte Dolman has lived in a variety of locations throughout the United States and Europe. But she felt no urge to put brush to canvas until she returned to her native Walters in Cotton County sixteen years ago. As she became reacquainted with this region where she had grown up, she felt compelled to paint what she saw around her — even though she realized the frequently bleak and plain landscape offered a particular challenge.

LaMonte paints largely Western Oklahoma subject matter. She has

never studied formally, she says. But she has taken classes through the sixteen years of painting; the most interesting was a live model drawing class that she, Leonard Riddles (the Indian artist Black Moon), and Thelma Cunningham and Leola Kerr, two other prize-winner Walters artists, attended one winter.

LaMonte has won a passel of awards for her paintings. Which was the most special? Without hesitation, she answers, "Best of Show in Walters' annual Gallery on the Green," which she won several years ago. Then she amends with a wistful note in her



Drawing by Joyce Wells

voice: "Maybe my first ribbon."

Oil, pastels, charcoal, acrylic, pen and ink, watercolor, landscapes, still life. LaMonte has done them all. The ink-wash technique which she used on the old gable-roofed Walters Presbyterian Church with its spired belfry is almost abstract in rendering. And yet she has captured the essence of that building in which I have spent so many Sundays.

LaMonte's philosophy of art is that you have to paint what you see. You put into your work what you see with your eyes. She sees the Western Oklahoma fields and towns around her and turns them into art.

Like LaMonte Dolman, Loreta Flack paints largely Western Oklahoma subject matter. And like LaMonte, she really didn't begin to paint until she moved back to her hometown — Hollis — after living more than 25 years in Dallas.

Loreta has always liked to draw. She remembers the annual county scholastic meet held in Hollis when she was growing up. Each year she would draw the required cup and saucer and a map of the United States (in her high-school years, a map of Europe replaced the map of the United States). Did she win in those contests? "I might have won Third Place once or twice," she says, and laughs.

In 1979, Loreta didn't mess around with cups and saucers and maps of Europe. She began to study painting seriously. She studied with Evelyn Byrd in Hollis, an "excellent teacher who inspired me to go afield." She also studied with Danny Gamble, a Texas Panhandle artist, and with J. D. Keele

in Ruidoso, New Mexico. It was from Keele that Loreta learned to paint the dark, leafy verdant greenery, what Keele calls "the old master's technique."

Loreta began painting in oil, but she is doing more watercolor since she began to suspect that her respiratory problems are either caused or aggravated by the fumes from the oil paint. But if she is working in oils, Loreta likes to do so in a class. She says she has more confidence when she has a "coach," that is, a teacher who will critique as she works and offer suggestions as she paints.

Loreta's favorite subject matter is what she sees around her in the landscape of Southwest Oklahoma. And she is finding many friends who enjoy painting this type of art since she moved to Walters in January 1985. Loreta likes to paint the old barns, windmills, hills, and Southwest Oklahoma scenery. Why? "Just nostalgia," she thinks.

And a strange thing happens when she paints the old barns and windmills and farm buildings. As hard as she tries to paint them as she sees them, her brush and paint restore them to their appearance in better days. Loreta says, "I try to paint them worn down,

but they end up looking new. I don't know what a psychiatrist would say about that." But she thinks her feelings of nostalgia about the buildings and locations are what cause her involuntary restoration of the scenes.

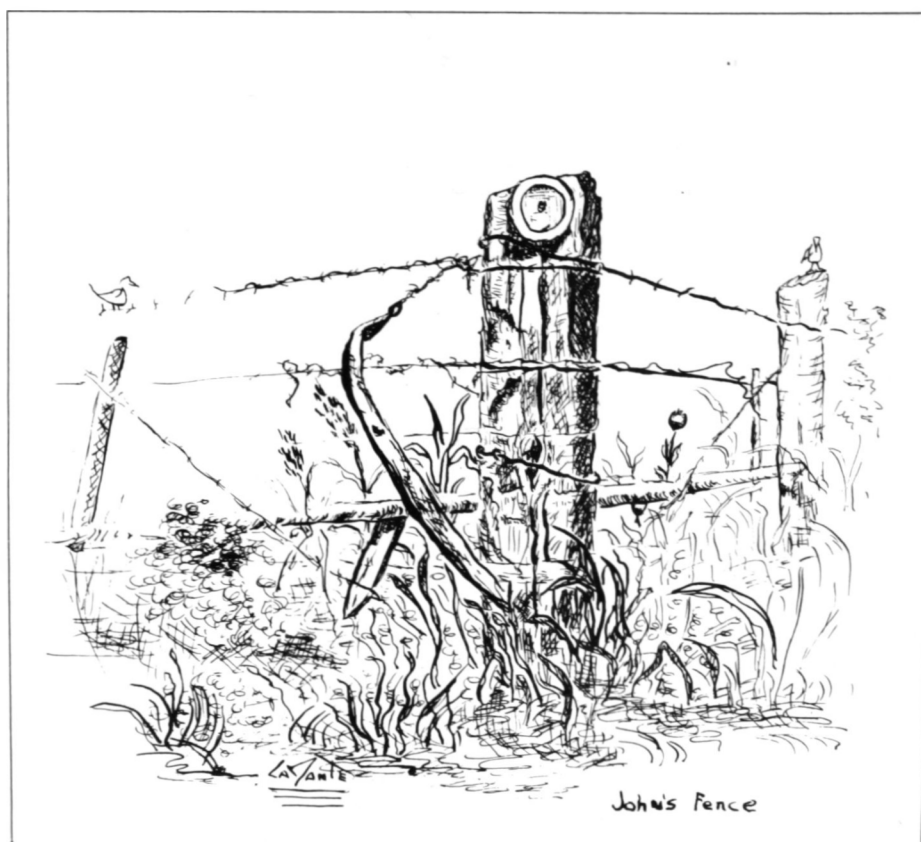
At art shows Loreta gets a kick out of people who look at her paintings and say, "Why, that looks **just** like our old home place."

Joyce Wells, who lives on a farm in the Griggs community of the Panhandle's Cimarron County, often painted scenes from her family's "home place" when she studied art at Southwestern during the 1960's.

Southwestern's Art Department had begun to expand and attract more students with the arrival of Ken Watson, an instructor who had previously been a commercial artist. Watson, along with Richard Taflinger, taught the classes in watercolor, perspective, ceramics, art appreciation, and commercial art which Joyce took. When she graduated in 1967 with a double major in Social Sciences and Home Economics, she had almost enough hours for a minor in Art.

Joyce says that Ken Watson was a great inspiration. There was one major disagreement between teacher and

Drawing by LaMonte Dolman



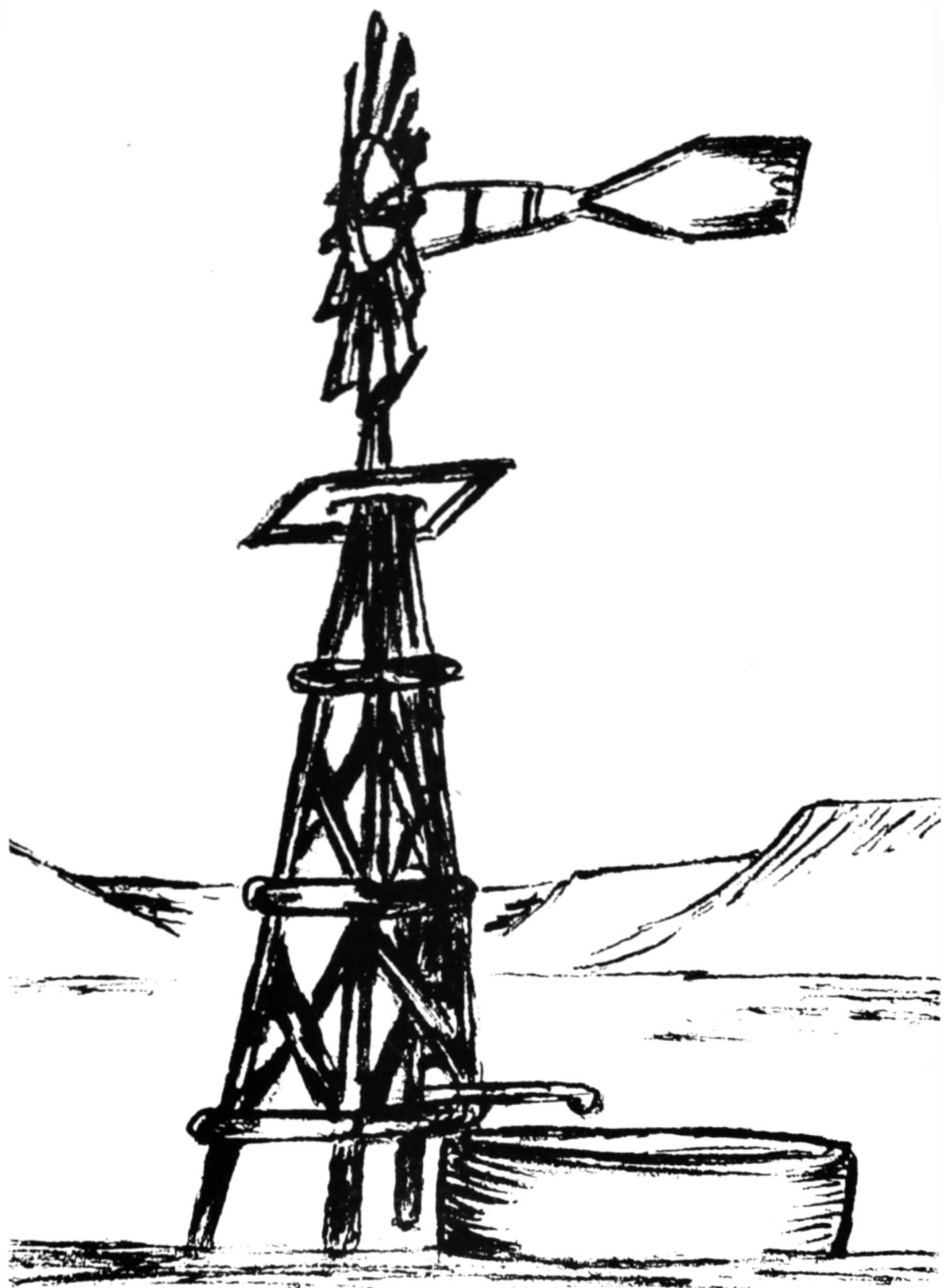
pupil, however. Joyce painted the flat Oklahoma Panhandle landscape as she saw it. Watson insisted that for good composition, mountains should be added to the background. A quiet but constant battle raged between the teacher's rules of composition and the artist's need to paint her land as it was. Since visiting Cimarron County in the fall of 1984 and seeing the table-flat landscape, I've had an overwhelming desire to blue out the mountains in the background of Joyce's water color that hangs in my hallway.

There was a reason it was necessary to acquire Joyce's painting through some fast talking: at the time Joyce was taking art classes at Southwestern, a policy was in effect that all student art became the property of the college. Joyce and I were roommates in Stewart Hall, and day after day, I watched her doing her painstaking detail work on her watercolors (her ability to do tiny tracery of bare tree branches is exceptional). I wanted one of her watercolors, but they were all class projects. I won't say which instructor capitulated to my arguments and let me have the gas well scene (the statute of limitations of student art might be longer than I think). But I suspect he let me have it because he decided if he didn't give me a painting, I'd steal one.

Joyce no longer finds the time to paint. Her job as elementary teacher at Plainview School keeps her too occupied for easels and brushes. her art has moved into other channels. She has completed a number of quilting projects that are true works of art in their exceptional detail. In fact, everything she does — from a letter written to a friend, to an embroidered towel, to a table setting — is an exquisite, careful artistic arrangement that gives pleasure to anyone who sees it.

Dolman, Flack, and Wells. A trio of Western Oklahoma women artists who find their inspiration in the sometimes hauntingly barren, sometimes evocatively beautiful land around them. In our Western Oklahoma landscape they have found line and color and form and beauty. And they have captured it in their art.

I am honored I can enjoy their work every day. ♡



L. Flack

Drawing by Loreta Flack