

secondary sources is an added bonus. Professionals and nonprofessionals alike will benefit from and enjoy reading these explorations into the nature of women's power.

Grant Wood's Main Street: Art, Literature and the American Midwest, by Lea Rosson DeLong, with contributions by Henry Adams, Sally E. Parry, and Kent C. Ryden. Ames: University Museums, Iowa State University, 2004. 251 pp. Illustrations, color plates, notes, chronology, exhibition checklist, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Karal Ann Marling is professor of art history and American studies at the University of Minnesota. Her many books and articles include *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression* (1982 and 2000) and *Debutante: Rites and Regalia of American Debdom* (2004).

This handsome volume accompanied a major exhibition of the original drawings prepared by Iowa painter Grant Wood for the 1937 Special Editions Club reissue of *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis. First published in 1920, Lewis's novel was widely regarded as an attack on small-town life in the Midwest. Its heroine, Carol Kennicott, is a city girl transplanted by marriage to the town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota (a thinly disguised portrait of the author's Sauk Centre birthplace). Try as she might, through spates of civic improvement, Carol cannot rouse the natives into open revolt against the strictures of village life. Nor can she find a place for her restless spirit among the vanities and complacencies of her neighbors. In the end, she leaves—and leaves the reader to wonder if she will ever return to find contentment as a doctor's wife in the drabness of the midwestern prairie.

With the passage of time, and the rise of a new interest in the regional richness of American life, *Main Street* seemed less savage and satirical to the 1930s. Lewis's unerring ear for the cadences of midwestern voices and his ability to find the pathos in the story of people who live out lives of quiet desperation beneath a veneer of respectability gained fresh admiration. He was a satirist, but he was also an attentive student of Main Streets and those who dwelt there.

It took the young Mrs. Kennicott 32 minutes to see everything there was to see in Gopher Prairie. It took Grant Wood considerably longer to choose his subjects and to complete the suite of nine intricate, layered images that would enhance Lewis's novel. Lea Rosson DeLong, the principal author of *Grant Wood's Main Street*, estimates that the project occupied Wood for the better part of three years, beginning in 1935. In one sense, the choice of subject matter is surprising. During the so-called Golden Age of Illustration at the turn of the cen-

tury, artists such as N. C. Wyeth had generally selected key moments in the action for their subjects. Wood, on the contrary, emphasized portraiture—studies of character revealed through body language, facial expression, and tiny glimpses of their Gopher Prairie settings. Indeed, the Main Street of the title appears only twice as the subject for individual illustrations: a rendering of Carol's gloomy frame house (titled "Main Street Mansion") and a moonlit view of pathways in the snow made by unseen residents bound for the pump or the privy, "The Village Slums."

DeLong painstakingly ferrets out the names and faces of the Iowans who served as models for the inhabitants of Gopher Prairie: the journalism professor who became Raymond Witherspoon, the salesman at the Bon Ton; the Iowa City dentist who impersonated Miles, the Swedish handyman ("The Radical"); and Frank Luther Mott, the Iowa man of letters who appeared as a loudmouthed booster. In his famous paintings, such as *American Gothic*, Wood often used friends and relatives to serve mildly satiric or humorous ends. It implied no disrespect to make his sister into a repressed farmer's daughter in rickrack, or his dentist into a wary farmer with a pitchfork because Wood isolated types from reality—features that seemed to him (and to his audience) indicative of the sentiments he wished to convey. The procedure was not unlike casting a movie, using a Clark Gable type for a manly, swashbuckling role. Wood's work is still both elusive and slyly funny because of this blending of the real and the typical.

Grant Wood's Main Street is also an excellent commentary on the varied artistic sources that stand behind each image. Wood's interest in German art, in printmaking, and in craft all come into play in images wrought from thousands of tiny touches of the pencil on plain brown kraft paper. That medium could not have been more direct, more ordinary—like the folks of Gopher Prairie. The reader sees the town, in the end, through Carol's half-hidden stance behind intricate lace curtains, her housedress with one button only half-buttoned. We see it in the American flag, the lodge regalia, and the flashy striped suit of "The Booster"; in Raymie Witherspoon's too-delicate flower and the shuttered church that looms behind Mrs. Bogart's pious smirk; in the gentle hands of the gruff Doc Kennicott as he leans across a homemade quilt. Every detail is visible in the abundant and beautifully reproduced plates in this impressive book/catalog. Those who love Iowa or Grant Wood or the art of the 1930s will find this volume a treasure and a delight.

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