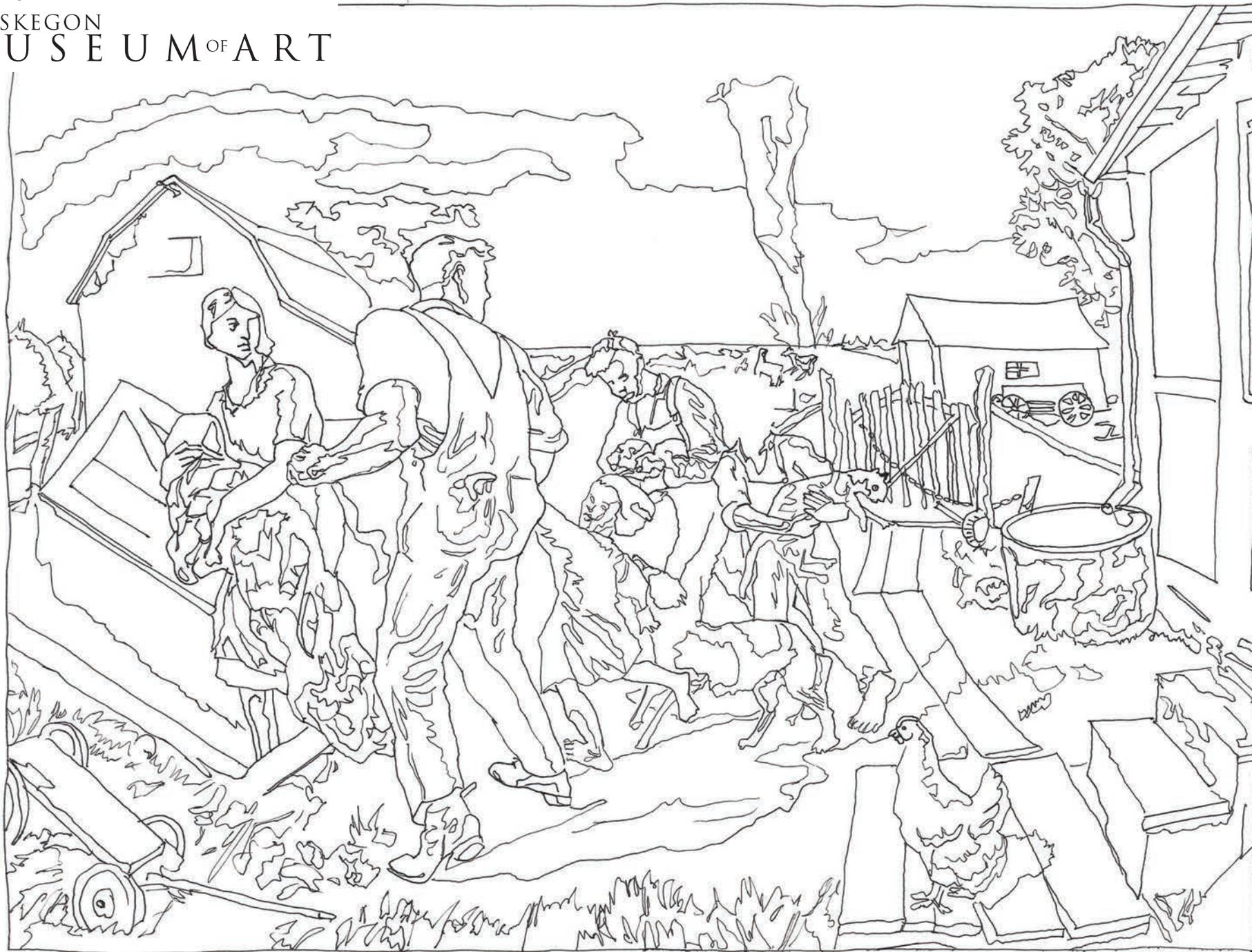


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John Stuart Curry (American, 1897-1946)

Tornado Over Kansas, 1929

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John Steuart Curry (American, 1897-1946)

Tornado Over Kansas

Oil on canvas, 1929

Hackley Picture Fund purchase

1935.4

Tornado Over Kansas may be one of John Steuart Curry's most famous paintings. It has been used to define Curry's career and the entire Regionalist art movement. *Tornado Over Kansas* depicts a distinct period of U.S. history and the struggle to define the "American" style of art. The painting has been celebrated from its first public display, receiving a second place award at the *Century of Progress* exhibition in 1930. *Tornado* has appeared in over 150 publications since its debut, including school textbooks, art magazines, art history texts, and the Hollywood blockbuster *Twister*. *Tornado* first captured the eye of the nation in 1934, in the pages of *Time* magazine, where the painting was illustrated in an article about the new U.S. style painters. The article included biographies on Thomas Hart Benton, Reginald Marsh, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood.

Curry painted *Tornado* while he lived in Connecticut, he was inspired by the memories of his youth and his efforts to define an "American" style of art. The house and barn look much like those on the farm he grew up on and are used here to typify the Midwest homestead. The tornado is the ultimate expression of the power the weather holds over life in the Midwest and on its farms in particular—its destructive force cannot be controlled or prevented and its visual presence evokes fear and danger. According to his widow, Curry never saw a tornado himself, but it is impossible to live in Kansas and not know the very real possibility of one, and the sense of dread that comes with every

violent storm. Curry would certainly have heard numerous accounts of devastating tornados and has depicted this one based upon spoken and photographic accounts.

Curry worked as an illustrator, and the dramatic narrative speaks to conveying a story through art. The figures in this drama symbolize ideas of family in Curry's Kansas. The father is central, his square jaw and heroic profile set against the fury of the storm. His wife is pale and frightened, clutching her child to her breast and looking to her husband for support. The boys are smaller versions of their father, serving as rescuers to the family's cat and dogs. The small girl looks up to her father as protector, as he pulls her by the hand to safety. The entire family is grouped into a circle, heightening their connection to each other and planting them firmly amidst the tilting angles of the farm around them. Their circular configuration also serves to repeat the motion of the approaching tornado.

Tornado Over Kansas found its ultimate home in Michigan. In 1935, the MMA acquired what became one of the great icons of American Regionalism. John Steuart Curry, Grant Wood, and Thomas Hart Benton were the most influential of the American Scene painters.

Today, *Tornado Over Kansas* is a national treasure and one of our most prominent works.