

Rafael Francisco Salas: In Flowered Fields

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Raised the son of a Mexican-American migrant worker and a mother who fled the suburbs for a life of farming, Rafael Francisco Salas grew up in the fields and forests surrounding his family farm in rural Wisconsin. Leaving home to become an artist, Salas spent 15 years in New York City, London and the American Southwest, returning to Wisconsin with a painterly appreciation for the splendors of landscape.



ART BY RAFAEL FRANCISCO SALAS. COURTESY OF MOWA.

Salas' paintings are reflections on rural life and the traditions of landscape painting. They express the poetry of the American countryside, but do not ignore its conflicts. Salas contemplates the original sin of Manifest Destiny and settlement, imprinted forever on the soil itself. Bleak, atmospheric canvases also give expression to the challenges of contemporary agriculture beset by climate change, corporate farming and political resentment. Simultaneously, the paintings communicate an interiority, an amalgam of feeling that emerges from the artist's psyche.



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In Flowered Fields is a collaboration with the artist and the permanent collection of MOWA. Salas has curated rarely seen works from the collection and paired them with his own artwork to create a dialogue that includes a milieu of Wisconsin artists present and past.

The installation at MOWA|DTN enhances the experience of the paintings. Subdued lighting, raw sheep's wool, tractor tires, and an accompanying playlist engage viewers' senses in an immersive experience that will linger long after leaving the gallery.

Rafael Francisco Salas is an artist and Professor of Art at Ripon College.

MOWA | DTN at Saint Kate—The Arts Hotel is free and open to the public.