BONE CREEK
MUSEUM OF AGRARIAN ART
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BONE CREEK
MUSEUM OF AGRARIAN ART

Agrarian Art
NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XIX, ISSUE II
JUL 2026



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THE UNCHOSEN ONES:
Portraits of an American Pastoral

RJ Kern

SEPTEMBER 11 - OCTOBER 31, 2026

R.J. Kern (b. 1978) is an American artist who loves digging into ideas of home, ancestry, and what makes a place feel like it belongs to us. He's built up an impressive exhibition history over the years, exploring different themes and directions, but at this point it's fair to say he's pretty obsessed with county fairs. Bone Creek Museum is excited to bring RJ and his photography to the community, giving everyone a chance to see his work up close and even take part in it.

His portraits highlight the close, interconnected relationships between people, animals, and the land—using those connections to explore how ancestry shapes who we are and how personal stories blend with bigger myths. His camera has taken him from researching his own roots in farming communities in Scandinavia and Ireland to looking at similar communities near his home in Minnesota. More and more, he's drawn to the next generation—kids who may or may not end up carrying rural life and rural economies into the future.

Inspired by 19th-century landscape painters, Kern leans into expressive lighting, both natural and artificial. He mixes old-school and modern photographic techniques to connect traditional farming life with what it looks like today. While he captures the fleeting beauty of youth, he's also paying attention to the realities of modern agriculture, hoping to spark interest and awareness about how American pastoral life is changing.

The Unchosen Ones: Portraits of an American Pastoral offers a fascinating look at rural youth today—and maybe tomorrow. The project started naturally and has grown over time, even continuing to involve local Butler and Colfax County students. The exhibit features portraits of young people with the animals they've raised, cared for, and prepared for competition, all hoping for that big State Fair win. But that's not what you see here. These kids and their animals didn't take home the top prize. They placed second, third, or not at all.

"No matter what place or award is received, the bond between the exhibitor and their animal is hard to break."

- Joe Scapanski, Minnesota State Fair Board of Managers





Standing just outside the spotlight, they show us a quieter story—one of disappointment, love, effort, and hope—captured in a way only photography can.

Four years later, Kern returned to photograph many of the same kids again. Sometimes the original pair—child and animal—appear together once more. Other times, the child has moved on, trading the animal for a new passion: a tractor, a chicken, a fishing pole. What began as a series about pride, joy, and the sting of being passed over has grown into something even richer, showing how these young people change, adapt, and keep going.

NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL
NEBRASKA CULTURAL ENDOWMENT

IMAGES

RJ Kern, *Live Action Role Players, Blue Earth County Fair, Minnesota*, 2022, archival pigment print *(cover)*

RJ Kern, *Kol and Annabelle, Anoka County Fair, Minnesota*, 2016, archival pigment print (2016) *(top left)*

RJ Kern, *Kol and Annabelle, Anoka County, Minnesota*, 2020, archival pigment print (2016) *(top right)*

All images courtesy of RJ Kern.

CALENDAR *of* EVENTS

23 MAY — **America the Beautiful**
May 23-Sept. 6, 2026

20 MAR — **John Spence: Cowboys and Indians**
Mar. 20-Aug. 17, 2026

25 JUL — **Kristine Allphin Workshop**
July 25, 2026

29 JUL — **Art Day Camp**
July 29-31, 2026

28 AUG — **Free and Whimsical Exhibition**
Aug. 28, 2026-Mar. 27, 2027

11 SEP — **RJ Kern: The Unchosen Ones**
Sept. 11-Oct. 31, 2026

13 SEP — **Opening Reception**
RJ Kern: The Unchosen Ones
Sept. 13 from 1-3 pm
Event will include a book signing and artist talk

22 OCT — **Museum Comes Alive**
Oct. 22, 2026, 6-8pm

CURRENT MUSEUM HOURS

Wednesday-Saturday:
10AM-4PM

Thursday:
10AM-6PM

Sunday:
1PM-4PM

Monday, Tuesday, Major Holidays:
Closed

Appointments and tours available

FREE admission

402.367.4488
www.bonecreek.org

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NEWS & EVENTS

NEBRASKA PASSPORT PROGRAM



Make Bone Creek Museum a stop on your road trip across Nebraska! This summer, the museum is a designated location on the Nebraska Passport Program sponsored by the Nebraska Tourism Commission. The program began in 2010 as a way to encourage residents and visitors to explore the hidden treasures of our state and boost tourism to local destinations. Bone Creek Museum has participated in the program in previous years, but this year, we are excited to welcome visitors to our new location and showcase more fantastic exhibits within our expanded gallery spaces.
Stop in and get your stamps today!

ART DAY CAMP

PLEASE JOIN US | JULY 29-31 *from* 10AM-3PM



Calling all present and future artists! Butler County Arts Council's annual Summer Art Day Camps give crafty kids and adults alike the opportunity to learn new ways of creating and to receive instruction from art educators. This summer, Gabrielle Comte and Sarah Juranek from the Bone Creek education team will teach students how to build and decorate accordion-style art books. Other sessions taught by lead instructor, Charity Schaefer, and assistant Flora Dalton include Op-art checkerboard paintings, felt ice cream cone sewing, 3D illusion creature terrariums, bird box sculptures, and air-dry clay keychains.

Sessions run **July 29-31**, from **10am-3pm**. Ages 8+ are eligible to participate.
Visit **https://bonecreek.org/events/ to register.**

4-H SUMMER WORKSHOPS



The museum has partnered with the Butler and Colfax County extension offices to host several workshops for students this summer. On June 2nd, students took part in a batik-inspired workshop in connection with Kristine Allphin's exhibition. Participants used the water-resistant properties of glue to create images on fabric with water-based paint. These works will be on display at the Butler County Fair in July.

Guest artist RJ Kern presented one of two outstanding workshop experiences for 4-H students on June 12. Students created their own pinhole cameras and photographed still-life arrangements using items from home. RJ helped them develop the images using traditional chemical development in a makeshift dark room. He will return again in September to teach the basics of portrait photography with an immediate and accessible technology–the polaroid camera.

HUMANITIES NEBRASKA

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

America the Beautiful: COMMEMORATING THE COUNTRY'S 250th ANNIVERSARY

Works from the permanent collection are brought into dialogue with one of the nation's most beloved ballads in "America the Beautiful," an exhibition commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States. Art has long served as a powerful lens through which to envision and pursue our highest ideals. From the earliest days of the republic, leaders and writers alike have celebrated the country's vast natural resources, sweeping landscapes, and the ingenuity of its people. Bringing together history, art, and agrarian heritage, this exhibition honors both the nation's past and its enduring promise for the future.



To encourage literature and the arts is a duty which every good citizen owes to his country.
– George Washington

FOLLOW US

DALE NICHOLS CORNER

New connections continue to surface as collectors link their paintings to the dramatic life and travels of Dale Nichols. Bone Creek was recently contacted about a work from his years on the Gulf Coast near Pass Christian, Mississippi. During that period, Nichols absorbed the coastal landscape, even living for a time on a small boat. Its influence subtly filtered into his farm-scene commissions as he continued to seek—and find—**Light, Order, and Love** wherever he lived.



Dale Nichols, *Untitled Boats on the Gulf*, 1959, oil on canvas, 20x24", Courtesy of Carlton Scott Sturgill



Dale Nichols with Nefertete, 1957, Bone Creek archives, Courtesy of Jim Millerv

SHOP



FOUR SEASONS MAGNETS
Purchase at the museum
$12 +TAX