

DEE HOOKER

Work, 2012
mixed media, 24 x 24 in.



courtesy: Art Hang Gallery, Tannery Arts Center

MOLLY GLOSS

The Mower

thing to do if he hadn't fallen in such a way that it yanked the mules, who were already upset, and this caused them to back up the mower in worry and confusion. Henry went to some trouble to keep away from the knife but one of the mower's wheels went over his leg and one of the mules stepped on his shoulder. He let go of the lines finally, and when the mules found themselves free, they took off straight for the house.

Martha was working with a young colt in a pen behind the barn, and Bud was riding up and down the ranch lane on his mother's old mare, Dolly. He was pretending certain rocks and clumps of trees were cows, and trying to get Dolly to pretend to herd them. When the mower and team clattered into the yard he turned Dolly to head them off, just for practice. When Martha shouted at him to get down from the horse he slid off and stood there while his mother came quickly out of the corral and across the yard to him. He was afraid he had done something wrong—she was particular about Dolly, in consideration of the mare's age and old injuries.

She wasn't looking at him, though; she went straight to the mower and bent over the sickle bar looking for blood. Then she straightened and said, "Bring the team into the barn, Bud, and water them, and then go in the house and stay there." He was too small to unhook the mules from the mower, but she didn't want the mules to have to stand there in the yard; she didn't know how long she'd be gone.

She took the reins from her son and walked Dolly to the big stump he used as a mounting block. The saddle he had been riding wasn't child-size but the stirrups had been shortened way up, so she had to hoist herself onto the horse from the mounting block and then let her legs hang down stirrupless. Henry didn't like Martha to ride when she was pregnant, so she hadn't been on Dolly or any horse for more than two months. Her belly rested uncomfortably against the swells and horn of the saddle.

"Go on now, Bud, take care of Mike and Prince. I'll be back in a little while." She put Dolly into a trot up

By the 1920s a few tractors had come onto ranches and wheat farms down on the flats, but the Echol Creek hay fields, up in the foothills, were too small and scattered to ever warrant machinery; all the years Henry and Martha lived there they had a mower and rake they pulled with a pair of half-Belgian mules. In August of 1925, the year their son Bud was four years old, and Martha five months pregnant, Henry was getting a second cutting off one of the fields along the creek bottom when an owl flew up from the grass underneath the mules. The bird beat its wings right in the eyes of both animals and they half-reared and then bolted.

This was ordinarily a steady old team, and they might have slowed and calmed before going very far except they ran the mower into a shallow ravine at the edge of the field and the wheels came up hard against the side of it, which threw Henry from the seat. He kept hold of the lines. This would have been the right