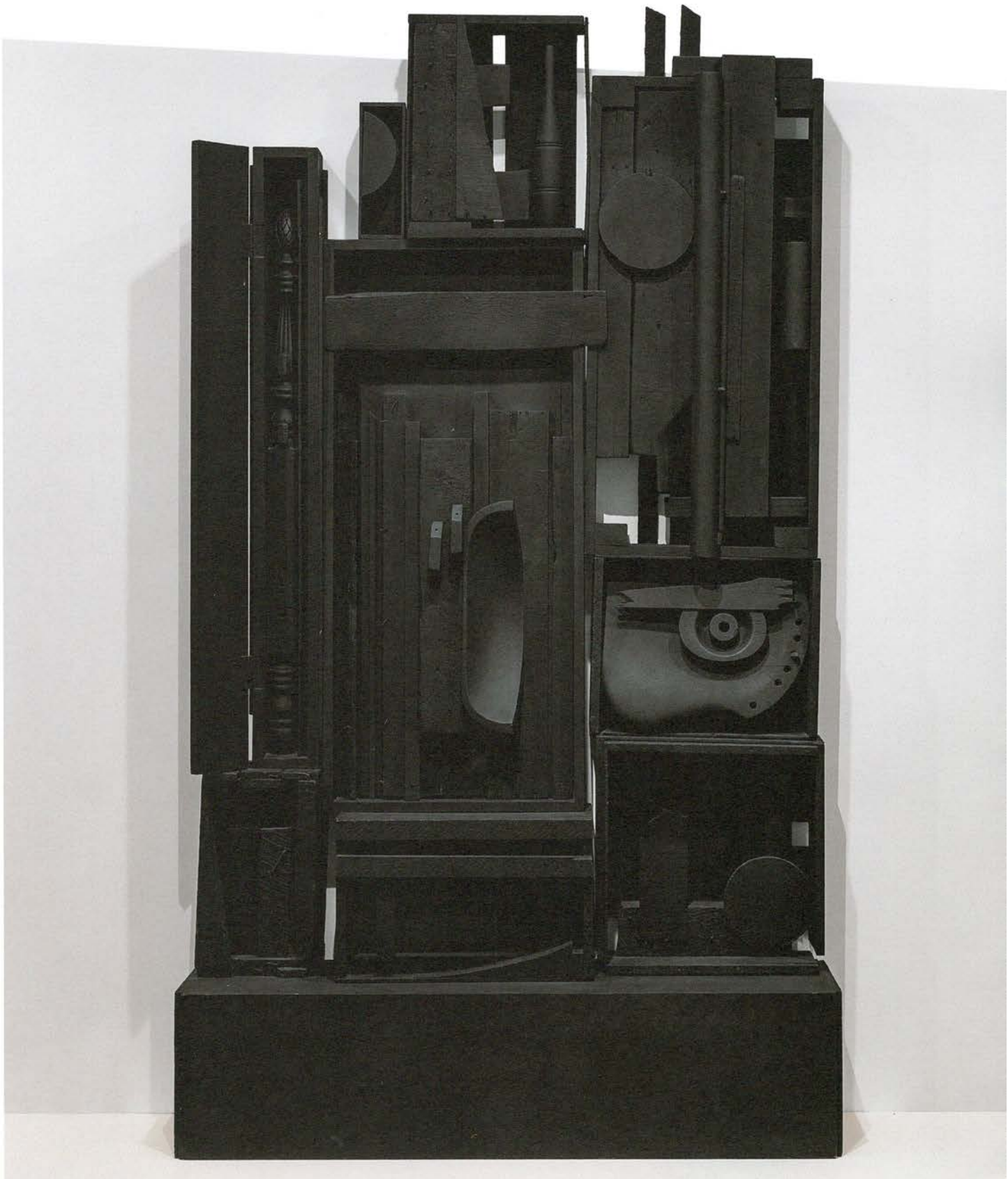


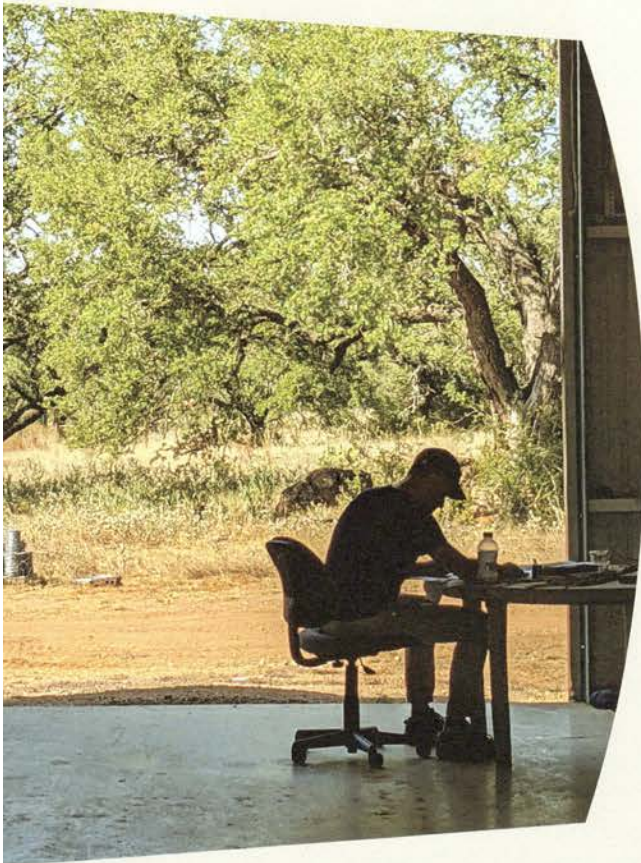
CARTER

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ART



Fire and Fences: The Stories of the Texas Prairie



Trespassers: James Prosek and the Texas Prairie is on view September 16, 2023–January 28, 2024.

Paper Forum | In Conversation with James Prosek on September 20

Trespassers: James Prosek and the Texas Prairie is organized by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The exhibition is supported in part by Kim and Glenn Darden, the Richard P. Garmany Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Jones Wajahat Family, and Fernando Yarrito.

▲ James Prosek painting in the Texas Hill Country, photo courtesy of Spencer Wigmore.

Before I came to Texas, I had never met people who had such a deep passion for . . . grass. Visiting remnant prairies and restoration sites in the Texas Hill Country, single strands of little bluestem sent our hosts—from landowners and managers to landscape architects and biologists—into fits of rapture. Texans' love of grass proved contagious.

I can't say I had ever looked at grass closely before—or at all. Where I grew up in Connecticut and still live, grass to me was just stuff that grew on highway medians or in hay meadows. Now, I was staring at a single six-foot-tall stalk of big bluestem, wondering how to creatively capture what I beheld. The grasses were beautiful, insanely so.

After my first trip to Texas, my perspective shifted completely. When I was shown the major prairie grass species, sometimes called the big four—big bluestem, little bluestem, switchgrass, and Indiangrass—I had a vague, almost nostalgic response. I had seen some before, in childhood. They poked above the cool-season grasses late in the year, beautiful blueish green in summer, some with reddish colors in fall.

When I returned home, I sought out these native grasses in Connecticut and found all four of the major species I'd learned about in Texas in a meadow behind a middle school nearby that used to be part of a farm.

One of the challenges for me in depicting these grasses and wildflowers has been how to express the things they need, such as water, fire, and grazing, and how to express the changes that have come to the Texas prairie under the plow. Once the prairies have been destroyed it is very hard to get them back. The story of a prairie today is largely about lines humans draw on the land and how nature needs to cross, or trespass, across those lines, themes that I have been playing with my whole life. I fell into it all deeply.

Over the years, I have met and worked with people around the world who are working to preserve cultural and biological diversity. The Texans' relationship to grass was something deep that I could not quite get my head around; it was just different in a beautiful way, and I am still exploring it. ■

JAMES PROSEK IS AN ARTIST AND NATURALIST

► James Prosek
(b. 1975)
Liatrix and other elements
(Thomsen Prairie and points near Forestburg and Saint Jo, Texas)
2022
Watercolor, gouache, powdered mica, graphite, and colored pencil on paper
Courtesy of the artist
© James Prosek



▲ James Prosek
(b. 1975)
Burned Log with Flower (Indian Paintbrush)
2022
Bronze, clay, oil and watercolor
Courtesy of the artist
© James Prosek



Read more about Prosek's Texas adventures and his exhibition at the Carter in this Carter ARTicle.